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Seven Puzzling Bible Books

A SUPPLEMENT TO

"WHO WROTE THE BIBLE?"

BY

WASHINGTON GLADDEN

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1897

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TO

THE PEOPLE OF MY CARE

WHOSE GENEROUS CANDOR AND UNFAILING KINDNESS

HAVE ALWAYS SUPPORTED MY BEST ENDEAVORS

TO SPEAK THE TRUTH

THIS BOOK

IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED

PREFACE

In the little book entitled "Who Wrote the Bible?" it was necessary to treat in an extremely cursory manner the several biblical writings. In the course of ten short chapters the sixty-six books of the Bible all passed under review; but a few words respecting its origin and character could be given to each. There appeared to be good reasons for taking a few of the Old Testament books and subjecting them to a more careful examination. The reader of this volume will discover that this was done in a series of popular lectures. They were given on Sunday evenings to a thoughtful congregation. They are printed substantially as they were spoken; I have not greatly chastened the familiar and direct manner of speech.

On each of these books many volumes have been written; no one will expect to find in these brief discourses an adequate exposition of any of them. I have only wished to bring to the knowledge of those who heard them and of those who shall read

them a few of the more important results of recent biblical study. In the Introductory Essay I have considered somewhat carefully the duty of Christian pastors with respect to their use of the Book from which they draw the substance of their teaching.

The kindness with which the other little book has been received by Christians of all creeds, on both sides of the sea, ought to be here acknowledged. To a far greater extent than I could have expected, it has been employed as a text book in Bible classes, and in assemblies of Sunday-school teachers; from several sources I have received skillfully arranged analyses of the several chapters, with supplementary and illustrative suggestions, which must have added greatly to the value of the book in the hands of students. To many kind letters which have come to me from readers of the book I have been unable to reply; let this be the testimony of my gratitude that so many have found in it that which satisfies their reason and confirms their faith in the truth which the Bible reveals.

WASHINGTON GLADDEN.

First Congregational Church,
Columbus, Ohio, October 11, 1897

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SEVEN PUZZLING BIBLE BOOKS

I

INTRODUCTORY

THE chapters which follow are devoted to the study of a number of books of the Old Testament in which serious difficulties of interpretation are presented to the ordinary reader. This book, like the one entitled "Who Wrote the Bible?" has been written for the plain people; it is not for the scholars; they will find in it nothing which they do not know; doubtless they will fail to find much which they deem important. Nor is there anything here with which intelligent pastors are not familiar. Most of the younger ones have heard all that is here presented in the theological seminaries; in their clubs and in private conversation they speak freely of these matters. But in their public ministry some of them are reticent. They

think it unsafe to trust the people with the truth about the Bible. It is this conclusion of cowardice which deserves, just now, to be challenged and put to rout. A more baseless, a more dangerous theory has rarely invaded the minds of Christian teachers. The absurdity of it ought not to require demonstration. The Bible is the book whose purpose it is to guide men unto the truth; and we are saying, under our breath, that it is not safe to let men know the truth about the Bible! If there is one book in the world concerning which all men are entitled to know the truth and the whole truth, that book is the Bible. If there is one book in the world concerning whose origin and character there must be no concealment, no deceit, no prevarication, that book is the Bible. Nay, if there is one book in the world which can well afford to have the whole truth about it told, that book is the Bible. Counsels of cowardice in dealing with this book are an insult to the book and to the Spirit of truth who speaks through it. If the Bible is a book for the people, intended to be read by them, and suited for their instruction, then they are entitled to know all the facts about it. They cannot use it wisely unless they

know what kind of book it is. Concealment of the truth from them is liable to result in serious practical error. A long, dark catalogue of crimes and wrongs can be traced directly to a misunderstanding of the true character of the Bible by men who believed themselves to be doing God's will. The murder of Servetus by the ministers of Geneva is explained by their erroneous view of the Bible. Since an infallible book justified the extermination of the Canaanites, it must be right, they argued, to exterminate heretics. The slaughter of witches by the thousand was the direct result of mistaken views about the Bible. Massacres most foul, persecutions most dire, have been the fruit of mistaken teachings respecting the character of the Bible. It is not safe to put the Bible into any man's hands until you have told him distinctly that it is not the kind of book which many people suppose it to be. "Of crude morality," says Professor A. B. Bruce, "there are numerous instances in the Old Testament; and no one can use it as a perfect guide who does not understand this." It was the failure to understand this which led to the terrible persecutions and atrocities of which the Church of the Middle Ages was

guilty. "When Innocent III. was giving to Arnold, Abbot of Citeaux, his infamous advice to entrap the Count of Toulouse to his ruin, he appealed to Scriptural authority both for his falsity and his ruthlessness. 'We advise you,' he said, 'to use cunning with the Count of Toulouse, treating him with a wise dissimulation, that the other heretics may be more easily destroyed.' 'Slay them all,' said Arnold of Citeaux to the brutal Albigensian Crusaders: 'God will discriminate his own.' We look on the Crusades in the light of poetry and romance; we admire the meekness of Godfrey of Bouillon in refusing to wear a crown of gold when his Saviour had worn a crown of thorns. But how did the Crusaders behave in their journey, in the brutal massacre of defenseless and unoffending Jews? And how did they behave in Jerusalem itself? Happy the innocent women and children whose heads they swept off with one stroke of the sword, or whom they stabbed to the heart at a single blow! But besides these murders they snatched infants from their mothers' arms and hurled them on the stones, or with horrid mutilation dashed their heads against sharp angles; and they made men and boys

marks for their archers, shooting at them till they leapt down the precipice; and others they tortured inconceivably; and others they burnt alive at slow fires. And what was the plea for the commission of these and other execrable atrocities? The savage commands to exterminate, said to have been given by Moses to the rude serfs who had fled from Egypt into the wilderness." [1] Doubtless many of these iniquities were justified to the minds of their perpetrators through a misinterpretation of Scripture; but many of them, also, it must be confessed, were founded upon an exact interpretation of the passages quoted, and were a simple reproduction of the spirit of those passages. What the Crusaders did was precisely what the writer of the One Hundred and Thirty-Seventh Psalm wanted to do. They did not misinterpret him. And the fundamental error of many of those who have found warrant in the Bible for cruelty and oppression was not merely their failure to get the true meaning of the writers, but their failure to understand the true nature of the book, — their erroneous belief that the

[1] Farrar's *The Bible: its Meaning and Supremacy*, pp. 190, 191.

Bible in all its parts is equally inspired and equally authoritative. That is a dangerous belief, as history abundantly proves.

It is not only safe, therefore, to tell the people the truth about the Bible, it is very unsafe to conceal from them the truth, and to leave them under the bondage of an erroneous tradition. If the people are to handle the Bible they must know what elements it contains, and how to discriminate among them. To hold that it is not safe to give them this knowledge is amazing fatuity.

This is the conclusion to which an increasing number of wise and well-instructed Christian ministers have been gradually coming for quite a number of years. The state of mind in which they now find themselves is not one into which they have been swept by any sudden gust of popular opinion; much less have they been seeking for reasons wherewith they might weaken the authority of the Bible; it is the reverent and careful study of the Bible itself which has brought them to the position where now they are. Ever since the publication of Robertson Smith's Lectures on "The Old Testament in the Jewish Church," which, to many English-speaking ministers, was the first

example of a sincere and scholarly effort to make the Bible tell its own story, they have been slowly coming to the conclusion that the traditional theory of the Bible cannot be maintained and that the truth concerning it must be made known to the people. Yet the difficulty and discomfort attendant upon such a disclosure often deter them. The uprooting of such a tradition is not a welcome undertaking. Pain is given to many devout souls; an opportunity of accusation and censure is afforded to those ignorant and jealous defenders of the faith who are always on the watch for error, and an occasion of stumbling is furnished to those who are prone to evil. I cannot wonder that many pastors are loath to speak frankly about this matter; I myself hesitated long, and I know that my motives were not wholly unworthy. But it seems clear that the time for frank speaking has fully come. The question is up, and it must be answered, one way or the other; it cannot wisely or honestly be evaded.

Is the traditional view of the Bible the true view? That is the question which must be met. If Mr. Moody's theory of the Bible is the true theory, Mr. Moody is right in

demanding that it be boldly and faithfully taught, and that no man be countenanced as a Christian minister who fails to teach it. If, on the contrary, that theory of the Bible is untrue, those who know it to be untrue must say so without fear or equivocation. Mr. Moody is right in insisting that between his theory of the Bible and that which he opposes no compromise is possible. If he is right, the scholars against whom he is lifting up his voice are flagrantly wrong. If the Bible is what Mr. Moody declares that it is, it is not what the great majority of modern Biblical students and investigators believe it to be. It is one or the other; it cannot be both. "How can absolute infallibility be blended with fallibility? How can infallible truth be infallibly conveyed in defective and fallible manuscripts, in defective and fallible expressions, or in translations which are liable to every kind of error?" [1]

The traditional and popular theory of the Bible asserts that the Bible contains no errors of fact or doctrine; that every part of it was written under immediate divine supervision; that it is God's book; that He is

[1] Quoted in Farrar's *The Bible: its Meaning and Supremacy*, p. 123.

the author of the whole of it; that the men who wrote it were simply penmen, following his dictation; that every portion of it is equally sacred, equally authoritative. For substance, this is the theory. The theological refinements about the difference between verbal and plenary inspiration, the speculations about dynamic inspiration and the inspiration of illumination, are neither known nor intelligible to the common people; the view which they hold connotes the strongest implications of absolute inerrancy. They have been taught and they believe, what eminent theologians have told us, that "a proved error in Scripture contradicts not only one doctrine but the Scripture's claims, and therefore its inspiration in making those claims."

This popular theory of the Bible is, almost wholly, an *a priori* theory. It is framed from men's notion of what must be, rather than from their investigation of what is. "What we need," they argue, "is an infallible guide. A guide that is not infallible cannot be trusted. If God has procured the writing of a book for this purpose it must be infallible. To say that it is not is to oppugn his omniscience or his goodness."

This is the process of reasoning by which the theory of an infallible book is mainly supported. It rests upon the assumption that men can tell beforehand what God would do.

It does not rest on any claim which the Bible makes for itself. There is no such claim. In the nature of the case there can be none. For so far as we are able to discover, not one of those men whose writings have been gathered together in the collection which we name the Bible had any conception, when he was writing, that his work would form part of such a compilation. He wrote to supply some immediate need of those whom he knew; the idea that he was writing part of what we call a Bible did not occur to him. At any rate no intimation appears of such a consciousness. How then could any one of the writers of this book have claimed inerrancy for the whole book, since the existence of such a book was not conceived by any of them? If the claim of inerrancy for the whole Bible is set up, in the Bible, it must, in the nature of the case, be set up by each writer for his own writings. But in fact no such claim is made by any of them.

It is true that the New Testament writers refer to the Old Testament writings, which in their day had been gathered into a somewhat indefinite collection, and sometimes speak of them with strong approval. It is not true, however, that they guarantee the inerrancy of all these writings. The text which has so long done duty in support of the proposition was mistranslated. It is not "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine;" it is "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching." So runs the Revised Version. To make this cover a claim for the inerrancy of all the Old Testament writings is greatly to stretch its obvious meaning. But if the New Testament writers cannot be quoted as guaranteeing the inerrancy of the Old Testament writings, much less can they be called as witnesses to prove the infallibility of that portion of the Bible which they themselves contributed; for of the future use which was to be made of their narratives and letters they do not seem to have dreamed. There is no word, therefore, in the Bible, in which a claim of inerrancy, covering the whole Bible, is set up.

Not only so, but the Bible itself, as we

have it in our hands, is all the while crying out to us that it is not the kind of book which tradition represents it to be. On almost every page some evidence appears that a literal exactitude of expression has not been thought of; that we have the work of men who were not at all concerned about verbal or literal inerrancy. If any words ought to have been infallibly reported they * are the words of Jesus Christ, but no two of the Evangelists give us a verbally identical report of what He said. If Matthew reported Him with absolute accuracy, Mark and Luke did not. "Take the words in which Christ instituted the Last Supper, and his last words to his disciples before his ascension, and the inscription on the cross, and the Lord's Prayer. Amid perfect unity of substance there is no identity in the verbal details, but omissions, additions, and verbal variations; and in St. Luke and St. Matthew we have variant records even of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount."[1]

The quotations made by the New Testament writers from the Old Testament writings show how little they esteemed this

[1] Farrar's *The Bible: its Meaning and Supremacy*, p. 110.

doctrine of inerrancy. Very often they give the substance of what they quote but change the form of it considerably; most often they use the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which is a faulty version, often inaccurate, sometimes misleading.

In many such ways the Bible makes haste to disclaim for itself that character of absolute inerrancy with which modern bibliolaters have sought to invest it. No intelligent person who will dismiss from his mind all the notions concerning the Bible which have been supplied to him from tradition and *a priori* reasoning, and will let the Bible tell him its own story, can ever derive from an inductive study of its pages the dogma of Biblical infallibility. It is this careful study of the Bible, and nothing else, which has resulted in rendering incredible the dogma of Biblical infallibility.

But what have we in place of this dogma? We have the doctrine of a book which is a precious depository of divine truth, — of truth contained in no other book; and beyond comparison more valuable than that contained in any other book; a book which gives us a revelation of God infinitely more perfect than any other sacred writings have

given us, since it records for us the life and words of Jesus Christ, who is, in the highest sense, the manifestation of God; and shows us the preparation for his mission and the beginning of the great consummation which we pray for when we say "Thy kingdom come." To one who believes that no event of history can be compared, for momentousness, with the advent of Jesus Christ upon this planet, it is not necessary to prove that the book which tells the story of the life of Jesus Christ and reports for us the substance of what He said is not to be ranked with other books; that it occupies a place apart, and is worthy to be called the Book of books. It is easy, also, for one who regards Jesus Christ as the central personality of human history, to see that many records of the Bible which precede his advent, as well as those which follow his ascension, are so closely connected with Him as to glow with his light and pulsate with his life. That these records are, in the main, veracious, is not to be gainsaid; no theory which treats the Bible as a tissue of pious frauds is under discussion here. The transcendent value of our Bible is not in this place disputed. He who says that it is no more than any other

good book does not express the mind of those devout critics who insist that the truth about it must be told. To them it is much more than any other book, and it is precisely because it is so much more to them than any other book can be that they demand that it shall be honestly treated, that no lies shall be told about it, and no extravagant and untenable claims made for it; that the people shall be taught to take it for what it is and to use it as it ought to be used, with reverential trust but with rational discrimination of its parts. The great words with which Richard Hooker ends the second book of his "Ecclesiastical Polity" must be laid to heart: "Whatsoever is spoken of God or things pertaining to God otherwise than truth is, though it seem an honor, it is an injury. And as incredible praises given unto men do often abate and impair the credit of their deserved commendation, so we must likewise take great heed, lest, in attributing to Scripture more than it can have, the incredibility of that do cause even those things which it hath more abundantly to be less reverently esteemed." Such is the grave disservice which many of its superserviceable friends are now rendering to the

Bible. "The attempt," says Mackennal, "to attach a name of special sanctity to all the contents of the Bible ends in the degradation of that name itself." The worst enemies of the Bible in this land to-day are some of its most orthodox champions.

That these are, in a true sense, Sacred Writings, and that they contain a revelation from God found nowhere else in literature, is the belief of the writer of this book. There is treasure here, beyond price. The only question is whether, like every other treasure of God bequeathed to man, it is contained in an earthen vessel. Is there a human element in the Bible? In an important sense it is God's book; is it in any sense man's book? That men had something to do with the writing of it is not denied, but how much? Were they only passive instruments in the hand of God, — writing machines used by Him, — or did their own thought and feeling find utterance in these words? If the Bible does contain a human element, it must contain imperfection. If men's thoughts and feelings do find expression in it, more or less of error and defective moral judgment must be looked for. What are the facts? What does a

reverent study of the Bible show us? Is this an earthen vessel? Are there no traces of human error and imperfection in the medium through which this revelation is conveyed to us?

One who starts with the assumption of Biblical inerrancy is, of course, disabled for such an investigation. He assumes the thing to be proved. He holds that because this is God's book it cannot contain any admixture of error. He thinks that to question the accuracy of any statement, whether historical or scientific, is to impugn the veracity of the Spirit of truth. If he finds on one page a contradiction of what is written on another, he shuts his eyes and denies that such a contradiction exists. That which is infallible is beyond the judgment of the human intellect. A man who begins with the theory that the Bible is infallible deprives himself at the outset of the right of forming or expressing any opinion concerning the accuracy or inaccuracy of any statement which it contains. In the presence of such an assumption the human reason is paralyzed.

Those who do not make this sweeping assumption, and who suppose that our rea-

son must be used in judging the Bible as well as in "trying the spirits," cannot fail to discover, in a reverent study of the Bible, many evidences of human error and imperfection. They are here, — palpable, undeniable; and it is fatuous to ignore them or explain them away. The treasure is in earthen vessels. The *a priori* theory that a book of God must be errorless is shattered by an inductive investigation of the Bible itself. The men who wrote these books were not infallible men, and they were not supernaturally protected against error.

What is it that we find when we reverently study these ancient writings?

We find, to begin with, indubitable evidence that many of them are of a composite character, made up of documents which have been pieced together not always skillfully, since they sometimes overlap, and sometimes show wide gaps in the narrative. That several of the Old Testament books are thus constructed is scarcely denied, in these days, by any respectable scholars. One of the latest of the conservative writers is willing to rank among the orthodox, "scholars who have conceded that Genesis discloses evidences of older documentary and tradi-

tional authorities, in narratives and snatches of poetry, and genealogical tables, and who admit different layers of legislation in the middle books of the Pentateuch, not necessarily committed to writing by Moses; who, for example, grant that Deuteronomy is a separate book, completed in its present form after the death of Moses, that the priest code is from a different hand, and that Genesis is a fusion of different elements." [1] But a book which has been constructed after this manner cannot be the kind of book which the people believe in. It is absurd to conceive of Omniscience gleaning up fragments of old human documents and joining them together after this fashion. Still less conceivable is it that the work should have been done by Omniscience in that manner in which, as we shall plainly see, it has been done in Joshua and Judges. Some of the conservatives make merry over the analysis by the Higher Critics of the documents into the four original sources, and it must be admitted that much of this work seems fanciful in the extreme; but let these conservative teachers take pains to point out to their congregations such pal-

[1] Behrends's *The Old Testament under Fire*, p. 103.

pable facts as are contained in the last chapters of Joshua and the first chapters of Judges, and reconcile them with the theory that Omniscience is responsible for the authorship of these books. Such facts as these require explanation. They do not militate against the belief that the record is, on the whole, true and valuable; but they show that it was put together by men who were human enough to make mistakes; and they effectually dispose of the theory that a superhuman freedom from error was conferred upon all Biblical writers.

We find, also, that the Bible contains a considerable element of religious fiction. That the books of Esther and Daniel and Jonah belong in this class of literature will be made evident, I trust, in the following studies. The uses of such fiction are manifest, and the great ethical and spiritual value of some of these ancient stories will appear; but as soon as we have recognized the true character of these writings, the standards by which we judge them must be changed. We are no longer burdened with proofs of the historicity of imaginative tales; our attention may rest upon the lessons which they are intended to convey.

Most important of all is the discovery which must be made by candid students of the Old Testament, that these Scriptures represent a moral development, whose earlier stages connote an imperfect morality. It is not enough to say that evil deeds and bad characters are faithfully portrayed; conduct which falls far below the morality of the New Testament is sympathetically described; the writers admire and approve actions which the law of Christ expressly condemns. These men of the olden time sometimes claim the divine authority for the performance of deeds which directly contravene the elementary principles of morality; they represent God as commanding men to commit the most abominable crimes. It is not true that these atrocities are common in the Old Testament: other elements prevail in all these ancient records, and the humanity and compassion which they reveal are signs of the Divine Spirit working out in the customs and laws of Israel a large and genial morality; but mingled with all this are the survivals of old barbarisms, which still darken the lives of the people and color the judgments of the writers of these Scriptures. There can be no doubt

that Moses believed himself to be commanded by God to order the extermination of all the Midianites; that he supposed himself to be righteously indignant when the warriors spared the women and children; and that the compromise made with the warriors by which they were finally required to kill all the captive males old and young, and the married women, but were permitted to keep for themselves the unmarried women, represents the ideas of morality which were current in those days. We must believe, however, that the writer was mistaken when he represented that all this was done under the command of Jehovah. And when the writer of the book of Deuteronomy recites a law requiring the Israelites utterly to destroy every living thing in the neighboring cities which they were about to besiege and capture, — "to save nothing alive that breatheth;" and when Samuel gives orders to Saul going forth against the Amalekites, to "slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass," we must suppose that this does not really represent the mind of the Spirit. Doubtless the people who did these things believed that they

were doing God's will; but when the writers that record their doings explicitly tell us that they were acting under the divine direction, we know that the writers must be mistaken. There is nothing else to say about it; excuses, evasions, palliations are not only futile, they are an insult to common sense. That the moral standards of these Old Testament writers are sometimes low and defective is truth that no honest man must deny. It is not merely true that they describe for us unworthy actions: it is true that they sometimes justify and commend unworthy actions.

Now all this, which the careful student of the Bible is sure to find, must be distinctly told to all the people. It is quite contrary to what they have been commonly taught respecting the Bible, but it is the truth, and they need to know it. The composite character of many of these writings; the way in which they are pieced together, out of older documents; the fact that some of them are undoubtedly works of fiction; the fact that amidst all that is pure and benign in their teachings there are elements of crude and imperfect morality, — commands attributed to God, which He could never have given, —

all this the minister of the gospel in these days is bound to teach his people. When this has been clearly taught he may proceed to settle his account with the Higher Critics, but not till then. After he has shown his people the truth respecting these most palpable results of modern Biblical study, he may hew Wellhausen in pieces before the Lord, as Samuel hewed Agag. But perhaps, by that time, there will be less need of the immolation.

For myself I am not disposed to deny that much which has been given out by the Higher Critics appears to be far-fetched and fanciful. The minute analysis of the Hexateuch which some of them have set before us does not commend itself to my credence. And many of their conjectures respecting dates and divisions of documents appear to me untenable. But this is the history of every science. Always the atmosphere of active scientific research is full of visionary guesses and wild hypotheses. All sorts of theories are put forth tentatively, to challenge attention and to await verification. For some of these, foundations of fact are finally supplied; many of them quickly perish. The science of Biblical Criticism

must pass through the same vicissitudes. Many conjectures have been ventured for which sufficient evidence has not been found. But not a few hypotheses have been abundantly verified. The assured results of this work are now considerable. If some of the students who have been exploring this field have seemed less reverent than could have been desired, and if some have even exhibited a disposition to discredit the Scriptures, there has still been a large number of devout and careful men to whom the Bible is a sacred book, and who are not disposed to admit any new theory respecting its origin for which there is not ample proof. The patient studies of these reverent scholars have made some things very plain. And those who adversely discuss the Higher Criticism are bound to bring out these well-established results, and make them clear to the minds of those to whom they speak. It is easy to make a large and impressive exhibit of the things that have not been proven and that probably never will be proven by the Higher Critics, and thus, by implication, to cast discredit upon all their work; there is no branch of science which cannot easily, in this way, be rendered ridiculous in the

eyes of the uninstructed. Any expert rhetorician could take the subject of chemistry or electricity and gather up the visionary and exploded hypotheses concerning it, and hold them up to ridicule, and make a great many ignorant people believe that they are pseudo-sciences; that there is nothing in them but unmitigated nonsense. We have had a good deal of this kind of work, in our pulpits and newspapers, from those who have sought to discredit the Higher Criticism. It is very effective work; the ignorance and prejudice to which appeal is made are highly responsive to such incitement; and one can without difficulty win great applause as a defender of the faith; but it becomes, now and then, a serious question just how much popular applause a public teacher can safely allow himself. And it may be well to suggest that those who undertake the public discussion of the Higher Criticism ought to give some attention not merely to its failures, but also to its admitted successes. If with a sincere disposition to know the truth they will try to inform themselves respecting the points which have been fairly settled by these studies, and if with entire candor they will lay these results be-

fore their hearers, they may then, with propriety, expose the vagaries of Biblical science. But when the clear gains of criticism have been laid before the people, the traditional theory of the Bible will have passed from the earth; and the teachers will find enough to do in furnishing to their congregations a new working theory, by means of which these sacred writings may be firmly held and profitably used.

What, then, shall wise pastors tell their people concerning this book, and the manner in which they may use it? It is safe to tell them that the book is a revelation from God, since it contains the record of the Life that is the light of men; and gives us the history of the providential preparation of the world for his manifestation, and the narrative of the planting and training of his Church. It is not an infallible book; but it is a book in which life and immortality are brought to light; it is the one book of all the world which clearly shows men what life means, and what are the true relations of the life that now is to the life that is to come. To say that all parts of it are equally inspired and equally authoritative is to make a foolish assertion; but it is

not difficult for those who will seek divine guidance to find it in the truth which will make them wise unto salvation. Without the guidance of the Spirit of truth, the Bible is no better than any other book; with that guidance no man will go astray in his interpretation.

To those who believe that the Incarnation is the central fact of human history, the words of Christ must be the master words of this literature and of all literature. In these we have a standard by which all these writings must be judged. Whatever in any part of this book agrees with "these sayings" of his we may safely accept as divine truth; whatever contradicts or conflicts with his teachings we may regard as a partial revelation.

Yet it must not be inferred that those portions of the Bible in which the revelation is partial and the morality imperfect are of no use to us. They are of great value. They show us the stages through which religion and morality have passed; they illustrate for us the ethical and spiritual development of the human race. And just as embryology shows us that all human beings pass through every form of lower

life to reach the human form divine, so we, in our moral development, often find ourselves facing the same problems which ancient Israel was forced to confront, and the history is full of instruction for us. Those naïve biographies, also, which bring the ancient men so vividly before us, never concealing their weaknesses and crimes, are profitable for instruction in righteousness. Abraham and Joseph and Moses and Joshua and Samuel and David, as they appear in this literature, have guided the aims and invigorated the courage of many generations of Bible readers. We must, indeed, be on our guard against accepting all the judgments of the writers of these sketches; for sometimes, as we have seen, they recount with evident approbation deeds that are not worthy of our praise; but in far the larger number of cases the judgment as it stands is true, and needs no correction in the light of Christian standards. There are even Psalms in the Hebrew Psalter whose sentiment no Christian can utter: but the greater number of them give wings to our faith and adoration; how many of our loftiest thoughts and noblest purposes have found voice in these hymns of the olden times! And the

great prophecies — how constantly do they lift up the loftiest standards before men and nations! Verily the truth is here in these ancient Scriptures, and it is for us to separate it from the error with which it is mingled. And that is by no means an improbable task. The Spirit of all truth who speaks to us through these Scriptures waits to guide us in all our study of them. He is as near to honest and reverent souls to-day as ever He was; and his illuminating ray will make all these doubtful things plain. Dean Farrar's wise words are worth repeating: —

"If it be asked, How then are we to know what is the word of God contained in Scripture? or if it be argued that it is impossible to disintegrate the word of God from the word of man, the answer is that this is exactly what Christians have already had to do again and again. They have been thrown, just as the Jews were, on the ordinary means of criticism and spiritual discernment to discover what entire books did, and what did not, deserve the title of canonical; and their decision has repeatedly shown itself to be fallible. To this day the millions of the Roman Church accept as

canonical books of the Apocrypha, some of which fall far below the level of many writings both heathen and Christian. For some centuries books were admitted into the canon which are now excluded from it, or books excluded from it which are now admitted to belong to it. The question 'How then are we to recognize the word of God?' is an entirely faithless one. We recognize it precisely as the Christian Church has always done. All Christians have set aside large sections of the Old Testament as belonging to an abrogated dispensation. They even treat some passages of the New Testament as not binding on them in the letter. They set aside no small part of Scripture as having been relative and transient. They recognize that the Tabernacle was a glorious symbol, but do not find anything which specially reaches them in long chapters about its upholstery and joinery, 'its boxes and tables and rings and lamps and loops and bowls and curtains and candlesticks and ram skins and badger skins and pans and shovels and basins and clothes' — quite irrespective of the question whether they emanated from Moses, or whether, as many critics suppose, they are not much older than the era of the

Exile. In spite of the Council of Jerusalem, which claimed the direction of the Holy Spirit, they do not abstain from blood or from things strangled. In spite of St. James, they do not anoint the sick with oil. If they were not constantly falling into the error of forgetting that Christ is 'alive forevermore,' — if they believed his promise that the Spirit should lead them unto all essential truth, they would not try to dethrone Him and set up a book in his place. Is it indeed the case that we have nothing to guide us with certainty about the way of salvation, unless we put a genealogy of Chronicles or a chapter of Numbers or Esther on the same level as the Sermon on the Mount? Did not St. John tell us to try the spirits? Did not St. Paul say, 'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good'? Did not our Lord ask 'Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?' 'To those who follow their reason in the interpretation of the Scriptures,' said Lord Falkland, 'God will either give his grace, or assistance to find the truth, or his pardon if they miss it.' 'If after using diligence to find truths we fall into error, when the Scriptures are not plain,' said Chillingworth, 'there is

no danger in it. They that err and they that do not err shall both be saved.' " [1]

But some cautious teachers who admit all that has been urged are yet fearful of the results which may follow the abandonment, by the people, of the dogma of Biblical infallibility. The Bible, they say, has been the great promoter of social and national well-being. The lands where the Bible has been read and honored are the lands that are happy and prosperous and free. The Queen of England was speaking advisedly when she told the Indian prince that the Bible was the source of England's greatness. And will not the change which now is passing upon the opinions of Christians respecting the character of the Bible so weaken its authority that we shall lose all these precious fruits of its influence? Will the Bible which criticism now offers us have the power to lead and mould, to leaven and control society, which the Bible of the last three centuries has wielded?

The question is one that calls for serious reply. In the first place, it must be admitted that it was not the error and the imperfect morality of the Bible which gave

[1] *The Bible: its Meaning and Supremacy*, pp. 127–129.

it the kind of power referred to. It was not the human elements which it contains, nor the partialness and defectiveness of its revelation which gave it the hold that it has had upon the life of the Protestant nations. So far as these errors have been taken for truths, and this imperfect morality has been accepted as perfect morality, so far the influence of the Bible must have been impaired. It must be better to recognize defects, even in the Bible, as defects, than to mistake them for excellences.

Nor could it have been the simple belief that the Bible is infallible which has wrought all these beneficent wonders. A mere intellectual conviction of that kind, even if it is in accordance with fact, has no practical value. A man may believe every article of the most orthodox creed and be no better for it. But if we now clearly see that the Bible is not infallible, the belief in its infallibility must have been an erroneous belief. Shall we say that the moral progress which has been so closely connected with the Bible is the fruit of an erroneous belief? Shall we say that the only way to secure a continuance of this progress is to exhort the people to hold fast to an opinion which is palpably unsound?

In truth, it is not the belief of the people in the inerrancy of the Bible which has brought forth this precious fruit; it is their belief of the truth which the Bible reveals. It is the belief in Jesus Christ and in his gospel; the acceptance of the truth He taught; the faithful following of the life He lived, which has made the desert to rejoice and the wilderness to blossom as the rose. It is the outflowing into the world of the truth and love of which the Bible is full that has done all this glorious work for mankind. That truth and love are there to-day; not one jot or tittle has been taken from them, nor can be; they can speak for themselves, and will speak: nay, it is not within the power of man to silence them. To recognize the fact that the vessel is partly earthen does not dim the lustre of the treasure it contains; it rather enhances it. To admit that Esther exhibits a low morality does not deprive the book of Isaiah of any of its glorious meaning, nor cast any stigma upon the noble philosophy of Job. To admit that the One Hundred and Ninth Psalm is the utterance of a dark spirit does not rob the Twenty-Third Psalm of any of its uplifting consolation. If the Light of the world is in that book it will continue to

shine; no speculations of man can cloud its radiance.

It is, however, probable that the deepest reason for the reluctance of some to abandon the dogma of Biblical infallibility has not yet been mentioned. That is the notion that some kind of infallible guide is necessary in religion; that it is quite impossible for us to live worthily or to teach correctly, or to maintain and propagate the institutions of religion, unless we have some standard or authority to which we may make appeal, whose decisions are errorless and final. This is the fundamental assumption of Roman Catholic philosophy; it has resulted in the erection of an infallible church, over which an infallible Pope now rules. When the Reformers abandoned the infallible church they still retained the fundamental assumption on which it was based and substituted for a Church a Book. It is now about time to see that the fundamental assumption is all wrong; that no infallible rule in religion is either desirable or possible. We want guidance, instruction, help; we do not want any form of words which can be pointed to as fixed, changeless, absolute truth, to which nothing can be added, and from which no-

thing can be subtracted. We do not need it, and we cannot have it. We cannot have it because words are not fixed symbols; they change their meaning as men change; a phrase which meant one thing five hundred years ago may mean something quite different to-day. An infallible revelation cannot be committed to such a fluctuating medium as language is. And there are certain peculiarities of the languages in which the Bible was written — the Hebrew language especially — which render this conception of an inerrant revelation a simple absurdity to any one who knows anything about them.[1]

But such a fixed and infallible revelation is not only precluded by the very nature of language, it does not conform to the laws of the spiritual realm. We are always dealing, in this realm, with the phenomena of life and growth, and infallibility is a conception which is wholly inapplicable to anything that lives and grows. It is a purely mechanical idea; it has nothing to do with the phenomena of life; it belongs in quite another order. There are no infallible spring beauties, crocuses, elm-trees, ears of corn. There is what we may consider an ideal, a type, for

[1] See *Who Wrote the Bible?* chap. xii.

all these organisms; but that is something purely intellectual, — something that no man ever saw. Some organisms come nearer to the imagined type than others; but absolute perfection of structure and form does not exist. There is always room for improvement. Nothing into which God has breathed his life is infallible. Nothing that grows is even for one moment infallible; the very condition of progress makes a fixed standard inconceivable. Infallibility may be predicated of a watch or a rifle or a cash register, — not of a fruit tree or a field of grain or a human life. Your artist will tell you that he has never seen a perfect face; your oculist that he has never seen a perfect eye. And when we pass into the spiritual realm the very law of the highest life involves perpetual movement forward from the less to the greater, from one degree of virtue and attainment to another. Knowledge must always grow from more to more, and our ideals themselves, the very norms of character, must change and enlarge as experience widens. Robert Browning has shown us the true philosophy of spiritual life: —

> "By such confession straight he falls
> Into man's place, a thing nor God nor beast,

Made to know that he can know, and not more :
Lower than God who knows all and can all,
Higher than beasts which know and can so far
As each beast's limit, perfect to an end,
Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more ;
While man knows partly and conceives beside,
Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,
And in this striving, this converting air
Into a solid he may grasp and use,
Finds progress, man's distinctive mark alone,
Not God's and not the beasts', God is, they are,
Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.
Such progress could no more attend his soul
Were all it struggles after found at first
And guesses changed to knowledge absolute,
Than motion wait his body, were all else
Than it the solid earth on every side,
Where now through space he moves from rest to rest.
Man, therefore, thus conditioned, must expect
He could not, what he knows now, know at first;
What he considers that he knows to-day
Gone but to-morrow he will find misknown ;
Getting increase of knowledge, since he learns
Because he lives, which is to be a man,
Set to instruct himself by his past self ;
First, like the brute, obliged by facts to learn,
Next as man may, obliged by his own mind,
Bent, habit, nature, knowledge turned to law.
God's gift was that man should conceive of truth,
And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake
As midway help till he reach fact indeed."

If this is the true philosophy of human development, then it is evident enough that a precise and inflexible rule of life is the very

thing that man does not want. "Forgetting the things which are behind, stretching forward to the things which are before" — this is the posture of the spiritual mind. All our thoughts about the spiritual life, all our ideas of conduct and character, must conform to this fundamental fact. Rigid and inflexible formularies are not to be desired. The revelation which we need from God is not an infallible rule, applicable to all conditions of life and grades of intelligence; it is rather a path of light through the ages, giving us direction, but leaving us free, in the light of great principles, to settle for ourselves the problems of every hour, and of every generation. Such a guide the Bible is. When we use it as it was meant to be used we find wise guidance and safe conduct through life; we have a lamp for our feet and a light to our path. When we take its every word as an infallible rule of life it makes us often bigots, not seldom persecutors, sometimes murderers. The letter killeth; the spirit giveth life. Strange that with such a solemn warning speaking always to us out of the Bible itself, we should have chained ourselves so long to the dogma of verbal inerrancy! The very thing which

the apostle tells us is fatal to the life of faith is the thing which we have insisted on as the corner-stone of orthodoxy.

Let us trust that the times of this ignorance are now well past. We are learning to free ourselves from the bondage of the letter. Having found that God has not given us an infallible Book, it is beginning to dawn on us that He never meant to give us any such thing; that all his plans for our spiritual education would have been defeated if He had done it. But we do believe that He has given us, in his good providence, a book of peculiar worth, a book out of which we may learn more concerning Him and his kingdom of righteousness and love than from all the rest of the books in the world; a book which tells us many of the things which it is of the utmost consequence that we should know, and which are found nowhere else; a book which it becomes us to study reverently and patiently, penetrating below the letter that killeth to the spirit that giveth life.

The familiar discourses which follow may serve to illustrate, in part, the principles affirmed in this introductory essay. They are the endeavors of a busy pastor, who makes

no claim to high scholarship, to show his people some of the more sure results of recent Biblical study. The books selected are confessedly among the most difficult books of the Old Testament, — those in which the conclusions of modern scholarship diverge most widely from the traditional theory. I trust it will appear that after the results of candid critical investigation have all been accepted, we have something left, even in these puzzling books, of real spiritual value. I will even hope that this new way of looking at them may impart to some of them a deeper reality and larger significance than they ever had before.

II

JUDGES

Out of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, seven have been selected for study in the familiar discourses which follow.

To two classes of persons I trust that these discourses will be especially serviceable. The first class includes those who reject some or all of these books as worthless, finding them rather stumbling-blocks than helps to faith, and discovering in them reasons for the rejection of the entire Bible. I hope to show these skeptics that their judgment is hasty and superficial; that these books, though not, perhaps, what they have sometimes been represented to be, are, when you handle them intelligently, of great value, capable of giving us instruction and inspiration.

The other class consists of those who regard the Bible as a book equally inspired in all its parts, every sentence of which was

dictated by the Holy Spirit, the whole of which is therefore equally inerrant and authoritative. I hope to make it plain to these persons that this view of the Bible is untenable.

I shall be asked why I indulge this hope. I shall be told that I ought to leave them in peace with the traditional theory; that it is no kindness to them to disturb a belief which gives them comfort. My answer is, that it is far better for them to know the truth. The view which they are entertaining cannot be held in these days by any fairly well-informed man without constantly doing violence to his intelligence and his integrity. The errors, the contradictions, the moral imperfections which appear in some of these books, which thrust themselves before every wakeful reader, and to which the attention of the whole world has been sharply called by modern investigation, must be met and accounted for by the advocate of Biblical infallibility. His task is to explain them away. It is a large undertaking. In prosecuting it, his intellectual integrity and his moral honesty are likely to suffer a serious strain. He is compelled to resort to evasions and subterfuges of argument which are not

good for the character of any man. Often he silences his reason by throwing back upon the Scripture itself the whole burden of the absurdity, and pleading that such things are inherent in a revelation. There is a story of a lad who was reading the narrative, in the second book of Samuel, of the woman bathing on the housetop. Never having seen a house without a peaked roof, he was troubled by the apparent improbability, and so expressed himself to his father. "Hush, my son!" solemnly whispered the devout parent, "with man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible." The story not inaptly describes a kind of intellectual abjectness which men are wont to display in the presence of the Bible. Not only, as in this case, do they make mysteries when there are none, but they are free to assume that not only mysteries, but mistakes, contradictions, preposterous absurdities, are possible with God; that when we find them lying on the face of one of these books of Scripture we must accept them as divine verities; that the refusal to do so dishonors God, because this is God's book. Such a practice is morally injurious in a high degree. If any man thinks he approves him-

self to God when he does violence to his reason and his moral sense, he gravely misconceives God's character. If any man thinks he is honoring God when he insists on attributing to Him the ignorance and superstition of man which we find in these ancient writings, he needs to revise his theology.

It is, therefore, in the definite expectation of important moral gains to those who take part in them that these studies are undertaken. That some may perversely use the truth here brought to light is not to be denied; no truth is so high or so precious that depraved minds will not turn it into a savor of death unto death. That risks are incurred in the telling of any truth is a fact which we cannot hide from ourselves. But, after all, there can be no worse moral evil than insincerity; no more deadly peril in handling the Bible than that which is incurred by those who conceal the truth about it; no greater irreverence than that which imputes to God the blind judgments and moral crudities of men.

With the sincere wish that we may be preserved from these perils, and not less from rash speculations and overbold assump-

tions, let us turn to the study of these ancient Scriptures. The independent study of these seven books is a perfectly legitimate proceeding, for they are independent books. There is, as we have seen, no evidence that any one of the writers of these thirty-nine books of the Old Testament knew or imagined, when he was writing his book, that it would be included, with many others, in a collection to be called the Bible. This collection was not made by prophets nor inspired men ; the question what books should be taken in and what left out was settled by men who could lay no claim to supernatural guidance. I am not, however, questioning the selection. Some of these books are worth more than others, but there is none that we can now afford to spare. Some of those which have been great stumbling-blocks to faith are full of instruction for us when we rightly use them. The point to be observed now is, that we have here not a continuous literary production, but a collection of books ; "The Divine Library," Canon Kilpatrick calls it. And it is, therefore, legitimate to select from among these any which we may desire for separate study.

First upon the list of those which we have

thus selected is the book of Judges. The book has in the Hebrew Bible the same title, "Shophetim," which is the plural of the word meaning judge. It purports to be a history of the Israelitish people during the period which intervenes between the death of Joshua and the commonwealth under Eli and Samuel. Both of the two last named were regarded as judges, but their jurisdiction was of a broader and more permanent character than that of the personages of the book.

The period covered by these annals was one of great turbulence and insecurity; there was no regularly organized government; the tribes dwelt apart, and were not always friendly. "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes."[1] It was anarchy, tempered not by a policeman, but by a judge. The word connotes more than the function of a judicial officer; these judges were popular leaders and magistrates. Thirteen of them are named; the exploits of seven of these, Othniel, Ehud, Barak, Gideon, Abimelech, Jephthah, and Samson, are told at considerable length; six of them

[1] Chap. xxi. 25.

are simply mentioned, with the number of years during which they exercised leadership.

The book consists of three parts: the introduction, which comprises the first chapter and five verses of the second; the history of the Judges proper, beginning with the sixth verse of the second chapter and extending through the sixteenth chapter; and an appendix relating two incidents of the earlier history, which have nothing to do with the Judges. The manner in which the materials of the book are put together is highly interesting and instructive. It is evident that it is a compilation of documents of various ages. The introduction is the oldest and the most valuable part. It relates the history of the occupation of Palestine by the twelve tribes, showing us how successive incursions were made into this territory by the different tribes, some of which were more successful than others in dispossessing the Canaanites. A few of the tribes drove out the aborigines; some of them were not able to expel the natives, and settled among them. The Jebusites, for example, held the fortress of Jerusalem, and it was never permanently in possession of the children of

Israel until the days of David. Others of the tribes, partly for economic reasons, suffered the Canaanites to remain, and when the conquerors were waxen strong they made slaves of the conquered. This narrative of the occupation of Canaan by the twelve tribes, as it stands here at the beginning of the book of Judges, is apparently a truthful record; and it is interesting to compare it with statements concerning the occupation which occur in the book of Joshua. Several portions of this first chapter are found, word for word, interspersed through the book of Joshua. Let me read you, for example, the account of the taking of Debir, which is found in the first chapter.

"And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir. (Now the name of Debir beforetime was Kiriath-sepher.) And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kiriath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife. And it came to pass, when she came unto him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted down from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What

wouldest thou? And she said unto him, Give me a present; for that thou hast set me in the land of the South, give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs." If now you turn over to Joshua xv. 15–19, you read this same story, word for word, just as it is here narrated. It is, of course, incredible that two independent writers should have told the story in exactly the same words: one must have borrowed from the other, or else, which is much more credible, both borrowed from an older document. What makes this more probable is that several portions of the first part of Judges are thus, as I have said, incorporated into the narrative in Joshua. The writers of both Joshua and Judges had access to the same old document. The writer of Joshua made extracts from it, and inserted them in his narrative here and there; the writer of the Judges brought his quotations together here in the introduction to his book.[1]

[1] "These notices display a strong similarity of style, and in some cases even verbal identity with a series of passages somewhat loosely attached to the context, preserved in the older strata of the book of Joshua. Thus Judg. i. 21 (the Benjamites' failure to conquer Jerusalem) agrees almost precisely with Josh. xv. 63, the only mate-

But there is a discrepancy here which the wit of man cannot reconcile with the theory of an infallible record. The writer of the Judges tells us that these incidents of the occupation occurred after the death of Joshua. The writer of the book of Joshua puts them all before the death of Joshua. There is nothing to say about this, except that one of these writers must be mistaken. This incident about Caleb and his daughter, which I have read to you, must have taken place either before or after the death of Joshua. If the writer of Joshua, who puts

rial difference being that the failure is there laid to the charge, not of Benjamin, but of Judah; i. 20, and 10–15, agrees in the main with Josh. xv. 14–19; i. 27, 28 with Josh. xvii. 12, 13; i. 29 with Josh. xvi. 10. Most of the verbal differences are due simply to the different relations which the fragments hold, in the two books, to the contiguous narrative. Josh. xvii. 14–18 (complaint of the House of Joseph, and xix. 47 Dan) are very similar in representation (implying the separate action taken by individual tribes) and in phraseology. It can hardly be doubted that both Judg. i. and these notices in Joshua are excerpts from what was once a detailed survey of the conquest of Canaan: of these excerpts some have been filled in with the narrative of Joshua; others have been combined in Judg. i. so as to form, with the addition of the opening words, *After the death of Joshua*, an introduction to the period of the Judges." — Driver's *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 153, 154.

it before the death of Joshua, is right, the author of Judges, who puts it after his death, must be wrong.

What difference does it make, you want to know, which is right? It makes not a particle of difference to me, I answer, because I recognize the fact that these sacred writings are not free from error; and because their value to me is not lessened in the slightest degree by the discovery of such discrepancies. This incident is a graphic and realistic little picture of social manners in that early time; as such it is interesting and valuable; the precise date at which it occurred is of no consequence. But these conflicting passages, and there are scores of such, do make it absurd to speak of the Bible as an infallible book. That is a fact which we must look squarely in the face. Not until we are ready to deal honestly with the Bible in all these matters are we prepared to receive the instruction it has to give us.

The composite character of the book is also made clear even to the ordinary reader by a little observation.

In the first chapter, and the first five verses of the second, we have a narrative of

what happened after the death of Joshua. In the sixth verse of the second chapter we begin to read as follows: "Now when Joshua had sent the people away, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the Lord, that he had wrought for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of the mountain of Gaash."

If this were a consecutive and orderly narrative, written by one hand, the fact of the death would probably be stated before the events that happened subsequently to the death; but if we have here ancient documents pieced together without much care for literary consistency, the present state of the composition is easily understood. It is interesting also to note that the words which I have just read are found in the last chapter of the book of Joshua. Here, again, one writer must have borrowed from

the other, or else both borrowed from an older narrative.

The stories of the greater Judges, which form the body of the book, are told with an evident religious motive. The writer wants his history to enforce a religious lesson; he evidently believes that all history is profitable as illustrating the moral government of Jehovah. All these narratives begin by saying that the children of Israel did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and that He delivered them over to the oppression of this or that oppressor; after they had suffered awhile under this oppression they cried unto the Lord, and He raised up for them this or that Judge, who subdued their oppressors; then the land had rest for a short period, after which the people relapsed into disobedience, and were again delivered over to another oppressor. In all these stories, says Dr. Driver, "we have the same succession of apostasy, subjugation, the cry for help, deliverance, described often in the same, always in similar phraseology." [1]

The apostasy seems to have consisted always in forsaking the worship of Jehovah, and following after Baal, Astarte, or the

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 155.

other gods of the neighboring nations. The writer's point of view is that Jehovah is the God of Israel, that fidelity to Him is the highest duty, that this must bring the people peace and prosperity, and that the disasters and oppressions under which from time to time they have suffered have been the direct consequence of their departure from Him and their worship of strange gods.

We find that this worship of Jehovah is not, however, the pure spiritual worship taught by the prophets; and it is difficult to believe that the Judges, who are here described and praised, — or the author who tells their story, — had ever seen even the decalogue, in the form in which we have it now. For although the worship of Jehovah is insisted upon as binding upon the people of Israel, it is assumed that He is the national God, that other nations have gods of their own, whom they are bound to worship, and that the power of Jehovah is by no means universal and unlimited. Thus we read in the first chapter (v. 19) that "Jehovah was with Judah, and he drave out the inhabitants of the hill country; but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots

of iron." The naïveté of this primitive conception is very striking. So, too, when Jephthah argues with the king of the Ammonites against the rightfulness of the invasion of the territory of Israel, he says: "Wilt thou not possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever Jehovah our God hath dispossessed before us, them will we possess." The argument of Jephthah, as Professor Moore expresses it, is that "the conquests of a people are the conquests of its god, who bestows upon them the territory of the conquered; they hold it by a divine right which should be respected by others who hold their own territories by the like title. Chemosh is the national god of Moab, and Moab is the people of Chemosh, just as Yahveh is the god of Israel and Israel the people of Yahveh. . . . The reality and power of the national god of Moab were no more doubted by the old Israelites than those of Yahveh himself." [1]

And not only is the religion of this book thus purely ethnic, the worship of images is a more or less regular feature of it. Thus Gideon, after his great victory over

[1] *Commentary on the Judges*, p. 294.

the Midianites, solicits from each of the warriors of his band the coverings which they had taken from the bodies of the slain, and of these he constructs an *ephod*, which is here, clearly, an image, probably an image which is intended to represent Jehovah. He sets it up in his own city of Ophrah, and the people gather there to worship it. A single sentence here expresses disapproval of this image worship, but there is reason to believe that this comment was added by a later hand. In the story of Micah, in the seventeenth chapter, no such disapprobation is suggested. That story of Micah is one of the most striking in the book. Micah was a man of Mount Ephraim who steals from his mother a large amount of silver, and whose conscience troubles him, so that he restores it. His mother, in gratitude for the recovery of her money, takes a portion of the silver and makes an idol of it, which she gives to her son, who keeps it in his house. An ephod and a teraphim were the foundation of their religious establishment, — and these were small household images, probably images of Jehovah, — intended, as the narrative shows, to be used as oracles. Having erected a shrine, Micah needed a

priest, and he took a young man of the neighborhood (perhaps his own son) and consecrated him for that service. But presently there came along a wandering Levite, a member of the priestly tribe. "And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Bethlehem-judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place. And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten pieces of silver by the year and a suit of apparel and thy victuals. And the Levite was content to dwell with the man, and the young man was unto him as one of his own sons. Then said Micah, Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing that I have a Levite for my priest." He has a shrine with the necessary images, and a priest to minister before it; now he is sure of the favor of Jehovah.

But shortly a scouting party of the children of Dan who are prospecting for territory which their tribe may occupy, passing this way, find this shrine and this oracle, and consult it as to the direction which they shall take. Following the counsel of the oracle, they travel northward and dis-

cover an eligible site; then they return, and are conducting their tribe to its new seat among the northern hills. But as they repass the house of Micah the bright thought strikes them that they might as well capture these idols of Micah, whose guidance has been so profitable to them; and they make a raid upon the shrine, and seize the images and are making off with them. "What do ye?" cries the hired priest. "And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thy hand upon thy mouth and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest; is it better for thee to be priest unto the house of one man, or to be priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel? And the priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod and the teraphim and the graven image and went in the midst of the people." After a little, Micah and his neighbors set out in pursuit, but the Danites laugh at him and he returns bereft of his gods, with a heavy heart, to his home. The Danites with their captured images and their conscript priest go on their way rejoicing; and after they have put to the sword the people of the territory which they have chosen, and have burnt their city, they set up their

graven image and install their priest, and the worship thus inaugurated continues through many generations. And now it transpires that the young Levite, the hero of this remarkable adventure and the founder of this religious institution, is none other than the grandson of Moses.

In all this narrative there is no hint of any disapproval of their conduct; the fabrication of these graven images, their use as oracles, the erection of this shrine, are treated as matters wholly legitimate, and the sharp practice of the Danites in ravishing the shrine and carrying off the household gods of Micah is told without a syllable of disapproval. It is evident that the writer sees nothing in it which seriously conflicts with his notions of religion and morality.

I cannot examine, so fully as I wish I might, the narratives of this remarkable book. The story of Jephthah and his daughter is a most striking revelation of the moral and religious condition of these people. Jephthah vowed, on the eve of a great battle, that if victory should be granted him he would make a burnt offering of the first living thing that came forth from his door to meet him on his return; it was his

daughter who met him, — and although it filled him with dismay, he kept his vow. "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord," he said, "and I cannot go back," "and he did with her according to the vow which he had vowed." The commentators have made desperate attempts to explain away this terrible story, but it is useless. The author means that we shall understand that Jephthah offered his daughter to Jehovah, as a burnt offering, in fulfillment of his vow. "One wishes," says Dr. Martin Luther in his Commentary, "that he had not sacrificed her, but the text stands there plain." [1] And the author of the book sees nothing to censure in his conduct, and evidently believes that Jehovah was pleased with the fulfillment of the vow.

If you have read the book through carefully, you do not need that I should rehearse the stories of Othniel and Ehud, and Deborah, and Gideon, and Samson. These are wonderful stories; they possess a perennial interest for readers of all generations; they have their uses, of which we shall presently speak; it is only necessary to remem-

[1] "Man will er habe sie nicht geopfert, aber der Text steht Klar da."

ber that they do not uniformly represent to us the mind of Christ; that the thoughts of the writers and the compilers of these stories are not always such thoughts as we ought to think about God and religion, about man and his duties.

What, then, is the real value of the book?

I answer, first, that it is a picture of a dark age, of the darkest age, probably, of Hebrew history. It brings before us in a series of realistic sketches the conditions of life and thought in a time when the knowledge of God was dim, and the ethical ideas of men were crude. The Hebrews are the people to whom, in later ages, the highest and purest conceptions of religion and of righteousness were given, but these conceptions were the result of a long training and a severe discipline, and this book of Judges shows us what the Hebrews were in the beginning, out of what kind of stuff the prophets and lawgivers and psalmists of Israel were developed. Perhaps you saw at the Columbian Exposition the Bell telephone, in all the stages of its development, from the first crude apparatus to the perfected instrument. It is very instructive to observe such an evolution. And the

Bible gives us a chance to study the evolution of the religious thought of one race, — the one race whose religious thought is most significant and precious. These folk-stories of the Judges are, for this purpose, of unspeakable value. The people of that rude time are permitted to bring before us, in their own way, their ideas about God and their conceptions of human conduct. Upon these pages, with the utmost simplicity and sincerity, they tell us their thought, they live out their life; we see them working, worshiping, scheming, fighting, journeying, sojourning; nothing is hidden from us; their crudest ideas, their most heathenish beliefs are laid bare to our view, — and this not by some one who stands outside, and moralizes about it from a higher plane, but by themselves, for the stories, though brought together by a later compiler, are, for substance, clearly the handiwork of men who lived when such conceptions were current.

Such, then, were the raw materials of humanity, out of which were to be constructed the sublimities and glories of the Hebrew faith. Men like Gideon and Othniel and Barak and Jephthah and Samson, with their

crude notions about Jehovah, with their idolatries and indecencies and treacheries and barbarities, were to become, under the education of the Spirit, such chivalrous heroes as David, such noblemen as Hezekiah, such clear-sighted moralists as the authors of the Proverbs, such seers as Isaiah and Jeremiah and Hosea and grand old Amos, such singers as those who wrote the Psalms, such spiritual philosophers as the author of the book of Job. A most precious product of divine inspiration is this spiritual faith of Israel; here, in the Judges, we see the hole of the pit out of which it was digged.

There are historical values, here, also, which must not be overlooked. Doubtless we get in the story of Deborah and Barak, in the story of Gideon, in the story of Jephthah, some substantial additions to our historical knowledge respecting the struggles of Israel with the neighboring powers.

And, more than this, there is stimulus and inspiration for virtue in the conduct of these heroes and heroines of Israel. We do not need to copy their barbarities: Jesus Christ has taught us how to discriminate between the good and the evil in their conduct; but we can never read this record without hav-

ing our courage strengthened and our patriotism quickened. Gideon's dauntless deeds, Deborah's flaming speech, Samson's sublime self-sacrifice, — the unhesitating self-abnegation of the daughter of Jephthah, all kindle in our hearts the fire of noble endeavor.

And higher than all is the lesson of the whole book, that the one supreme thing is to be faithful to your highest convictions. All these stories make this clear; it is the one truth that they all emphasize. Fidelity to Jehovah brought welfare and liberty and peace to Israel; disobedience to Him brought bondage and misery. Now Jehovah and his law was to these Israelites the highest truth they knew. It was a very crude notion that they had about Him; but He represented to them the best life of which they could conceive. They knew that when they forsook Him and went after Baal and Astarte with their licentious rites, they were preferring the lower to the higher. For them, as for us, there was a law in the members warring against the law in the mind, and when they dethroned the angel and enthroned the beast they knew that they were wrong. This primary conviction the book everywhere confirms; it bears witness that when

men follow the highest that they know, it is well with them; and that when they forsake the highest that they know and go after other gods it is ill with them. And this, I say, is the supreme lesson of life. It is just as true for us as it was for those half-savage Israelites. There are a good many of us, I fear, who are doing just what they did: we are false to our ideals; we are not following the highest truth we know; we are seeking gains, prizes, pleasures that do not ennoble, but rather degrade us; these are our idols, for an idol is anything to which a man turns when he forsakes his ideals; and by as much as our ideals are higher and purer than those of the old Israelites, by so much is our condemnation greater than theirs, our bondage harder to break, our loss more nearly irreparable. The book of Judges teaches us this lesson: that fidelity to the highest truth you know is the straight path to life. If we learn this lesson out of this book we shall have reason to thank God that He has hidden for us in one of the puzzling books of the Bible a pearl of great price.

III

ESTHER

In our English Bibles the book of Esther follows the historical books, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah; but the arrangement of the Hebrew Bibles is different. The three divisions of the Hebrew Bible contain the Law, the Prophets, and the Ketubim or Writings; and this order represents the Jewish idea of their comparative value. The first division, the Law, includes the first five books of the Bible, and is to the Jew the most precious portion of the book. The second division, the Prophets, includes the books of Joshua, the Judges, Samuel, and Kings, as well as those which *we* call the prophetical books, Daniel only excepted; and this division is regarded by them as second in value to the Law. The Ketubim or Writings includes the remaining books of the Bible. Among these we find The Psalms, The Proverbs, Job, The Song of Songs, Ruth, The Lamentations, Ecclesiastes,

Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Chronicles. This third division was considered by the Jews to be the least valuable of their Scriptures, though they placed a high estimate on some of these books, as we shall see. Most of these are undoubtedly of a late date; and the later writings were not so highly prized as the earlier ones. It will be observed that five of the seven Old Testament books which we have chosen to study are found in this less esteemed division of the Jewish Bible. It would seem, therefore, that some of the difficulties which we find in them may have occurred to the Jews themselves. Yet their judgment of the worth of these Scriptures cannot be given much weight in our decision concerning them; the Rabbinical notions of what is excellent in Scripture do not always evince a clear spiritual insight.

Respecting the books contained in the first and second divisions of the Hebrew Bible, there has been, so far as I know, no controversy among the Jews themselves. But the contents of this last division have been somewhat disputed. About Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, The Proverbs, and Esther, there were differences of opinion

among the doctors of the law. There were those who contended that this book of Esther should not be included among the sacred writings because of its total lack of religiousness. "The book of Esther," says Ryle, "the composition of which may very probably be assigned to the third century B. C., became in later days one of the most popular writings of the Ketubim. But its admission to the Canon was either so long delayed or was afterwards, for some reason, regarded with such disfavor that in some quarters, among the Jews of the first century A. D., as we shall see later on, it was omitted altogether from the list of sacred books."

Professor Ryle quotes from the Talmudic literature several discussions about Esther. In one of them the book, Esther, is personified, and represented as petitioning for admission to the Canon, and the reply of "the Wise" is interpreted as meaning that it belongs in neither of the three classes of Scripture, and that a fourth class cannot be made to receive it. Rabbi Jehudi is reported as deciding that "the book of Esther defileth not the hands" — is not inspired. Other rabbins give a contrary opinion, furnishing very dubious and fantastic reasons for it.

"Such sayings imply," says Professor Ryle, "that there had been some hesitation in accepting the canonicity of the book.[1] But the difficulties that had been felt vanished before the application of these strange methods of interpretation." [2]

This protest was not silenced until the first century of our era. While our Lord was teaching in Jerusalem, the right of Ecclesiastes and Esther to be regarded as Holy Scriptures must, therefore, have been still discussed by some learned Jews.[3] Not only

[1] "Down into the second century of our era the canonical authority of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Canticles, and Esther was warmly debated by Jewish scholars." — Wildeboer's *Origin of Canon of Old Testament*, p. 72.

[2] *Canon of the Old Testament*, 2d ed., pp. 149, 210–212.

[3] Some of the scholars think that the discussions of the Rabbis respecting the canonicity of Esther, which we find reported in some of the Talmudical books, were only exercises in dialectic, objections being raised for the sake of answering them. The fact, however, remains that it was precisely those books whose title to a place among the Scriptures is most questionable upon which they exercised their dialectic. I do not know that any such debates are reported about Isaiah or Jeremiah or Amos or Micah. It would seem that there must have been some doubt in their minds concerning the moral and religious character of this book. On this whole subject see the learned and thorough discussion of Dr. G. Wildeboer, in *The Origin of the Canon of the Old Testament*, where the author makes it clear that the discussions

was this true, but quite a number of the books which are now excluded from our Protestant Bibles, the books of the Apocrypha, were undoubtedly included in that Greek translation of the Old Testament which seems to have been used by Jesus and his disciples, and from which most of their quotations were undoubtedly made.

It became necessary, therefore, for the Christians, when they began to use the Old Testament Scriptures, to determine for themselves how many of these Old Testament books were sacred writings. Should they reject Esther and Ecclesiastes and Solomon's Song? Should they take in the Maccabees and Judith and Esdras and the Wisdom of Solomon? It took them a long time to make up their minds. Athanasius counted Esther among the apocryphal books; Amphilochius of Iconium says that some think that Esther should be regarded as belonging to the Holy Scripture; Augustine lets into his collection some of the apocryphal books, but puts out Esther; Gregory of Nazianzen omits it from his catalogue.

of the Talmud are not, as Strack maintains, mere critical fencing, but represent serious doubts as to the right of the book to its place among the Sacred Scriptures.

In speaking of the objections to Old Testament books which caused some of the Fathers to demand their withdrawal from the Canon, Professor Ryle says: "Opposition to the book of Esther appears to have taken this open form. Its withdrawal may, of course, have only expressed a local prejudice due to the teaching of some influential Rabbi. But the fact of the book having been actually excluded from a Jewish list of Canonical Scripture merits attention. For, although we learn of it from a Christian source, the position of the book of Esther in certain other Christian lists which profess to give the contents of the Hebrew Canon indicates the suspicion with which it was apt to be regarded. Melito, the Bishop of Sardis (*circ.* 170 A. D.), sent to a friend a list of the Old Testament Scriptures which he professed to have obtained from accurate inquiry, while traveling in the East, in Syria. Its contents agree with those of the Hebrew Canon, save in the omission of Esther."[1]

Professor Ryle proceeds to discuss the question whether this omission was accidental or intentional, and comes to the conclusion that it was probably intentional.

[1] *Canon of the Old Testament*, p. 203.

"For," he says, "the same unfavorable opinion which the omission would denote is not only expressed in the Rabbinical discussions mentioned in the previous chapter, but is also implied in the position allotted to the book in other Christian writings which claim to reproduce the contents of the Hebrew Canon." And he readily concedes that to Christian readers of those days "the character of the book may very naturally have given rise to difficulties. Its spirit and teaching seemed to have little in common with the New Testament." [1]

The learned and judicious Professor Sanday, after mentioning the long dissent of the Christian Fathers to the canonicity of Esther, adds: "There was certainly room for such objection. The book of Esther derives no sanction from the New Testament. It has often been pointed out that it does not even mention the name of God; and it adds nothing to the sum of revelation. The book, as we have seen, after a time secured its place in the Jewish Canon and through the Jewish passed over into the Christian canon; but more, we may believe, by way of tacit acquiescence than of active approval." [2]

[1] Pp. 204, 205. [2] *Inspiration*, p. 214.

The fact thus appears that good men both in the Jewish and in the Christian churches until a late date disputed the admission of this book to the canon of the Scripture. Indeed, so late as the time of the Reformation Dr. Martin Luther was quite positive in his judgment that the book had no rightful place in the Bible. "We have excluded some books," he said, "but this, most of all, deserves to be cast out. It Judaizes too much, and contains much heathen naughtiness." If you and I should venture, therefore, to question the historical accuracy of this book and the soundness of its morality we should find ourselves in good company. One can very well afford to be called a heretic along with Athanasius, and Augustine, and Gregory of Nazianzen, and Martin Luther.

The gradual weakening of the Christian protest against the book of Esther was due, perhaps, in part, to the gradual strengthening of the Jewish theories concerning the sacredness of the book. For though, as I have said, it was one of the books in dispute among the Jews up to the beginning of our era, from that time onward Jewish opinion became more and more positive and enthusi-

astic respecting it. This was partly because of its connection with the feast of Purim, which was becoming more and more popular, and largely because of its extravagant representations of Jewish prestige and power. From being one of the disputed books of the Ketubim it came to be the most esteemed of all; so that one of their great authorities, Moses Maimonides, expresses the opinion that when the Messiah shall come, all the prophetical books and all the books of the Ketubim except Esther will be done away; that the only Bible which the Jews will need in that great day will be the Pentateuch and the book of Esther. How much the opinion of such a writer is worth on a question of inspiration I leave you to say. So far as the decision of the Christian Fathers with respect to this book was founded on Jewish opinion, it does not rest on a good foundation.

Let us briefly review the story. The scene is laid at Shushan the palace, by which is undoubtedly intended Susa, the Persian capital. The ancient Elam, lying a few hundred miles north of the head of the Persian Gulf, is one of the oldest seats of civilization. The people who originally inhabited the

region appear to have been Semites, but they were driven out, as the Celts were driven out of England by the Saxons; and the Cushite invaders became the permanent occupants of the country. The territory lies east of the Tigris, a fertile plain stretching back to mountains with ample pasturage, from which streams with abundant and pure water descend to the great river. Elam, later known as Susiana, was a tributary province of Babylon; but when the Persians became the dominant race Darius the Great built Susa, the Shushan of this story. The climate was better than that of Persepolis, or Babylon, and the water was purer; it became the favorite capital of the great king. The palace was almost an exact copy of that at Persepolis, the ruins of which have been uncovered; there is a familiar picture of the lions mounting the mighty staircase to the terrace where a few pillars, lonely in the moonlight, stand as monuments of the grandeur forever gone. This is Persepolis, and the palace at Susa was built after the same plan, except that this grand staircase was not repeated.

The son of Darius who succeeded him was known by the Persians as Khschyarschan;

the Hebrews spelled it Achaschverosch, which our translators have softened into Ahasuerus; the Greek form of it is Xerxes. It seems clear that the story intends to bring before us the great Persian despot whose stupendous exploits Herodotus has rehearsed in his glowing narrative. Darius his father had been meditating the invasion of little Greece, for whom he had no more love than Abdul the Infamous has to-day. In the midst of his preparations he suddenly died, and Xerxes, on his succession, having put down an insurrection among his subject Egyptians, took up his father's unfinished enterprise. Four years were devoted to the gathering and equipment of the army and the navy; all the countries of the East and even Africa were drawn upon for troops, and the land and naval forces that were finally led through Asia Minor and up the Mediterranean formed, undoubtedly, the biggest marching aggregation of human beings that ever has been gathered together since the world began.

The fighting men are said by Herodotus to have numbered 2,500,000, and the fleet consisted of 1207 fighting vessels, besides 3000 smaller vessels. The camp followers

greatly swelled this number; Herodotus wishes us to believe that there were six millions in all. It is generally safe to divide the figures of an Oriental historian by five; even so, there may have been a million men in the Persian host. I do not need to tell the story, the bridging of the Hellespont, the cutting of the canal through the peninsula of Athos; the march through those very plains and defiles of Thessaly where the Turks and the Greeks have been fighting just now; the immortal struggle at Thermopylæ, where the Greeks of to-day threatened to make their final stand; the capture and destruction of Athens, the victory of the Greek fleet at Salamis, and the cowardly and precipitate flight of Xerxes, with the scattering and destruction of his stupendous army, very few of whose battalions ever found their way back to Persia — all this is a very old story. All that we know of Xerxes leads us to feel that he was one of the sort of men of whom the world cannot have too few. Vainglorious, pusillanimous, licentious, and bloodthirsty, he was a nearly perfect embodiment of most of the qualities which a ruler of men ought not to possess. When a father who had sent

five sons into his great army begged that the sixth might stay at home, he showed his sympathy with the father by having the body of this sixth son cut in twain and making the father march between the two halves of it on his way to Greece. When a storm destroyed his bridge over the Hellespont, he not only cut off the heads of the engineers who built it, but he ordered three hundred lashes to be administered to the rebellious Hellespont, and a pair of fetters to be thrown into it. The author of the book of Esther probably knew something about Xerxes; and most of what is told us of Ahasuerus might well enough have been true of the Persian despot. So far as the king's character is concerned the verisimilitude is fairly close.

This, then, is the king with the unpronounceable name and the insatiable ambition, who is said to have made a great feast for his nobles, lasting 180 days, and then for all the people of Susa, continuing a full week. Some say that it was a feast in celebration of that conquest of Greece which he was going forth to win, and that it occurred just before his departure on that ill-fated campaign; that he spent the last six

months of his preparation for the invasion in a drunken orgy. But this is conjecture. On the last day of this debauch, having nearly exhausted the resources of indecency, he summons his queen to exhibit her beauty before his drunken nobles; when she refuses, as by all the traditions of his court, as well as the instincts of womanhood, she was bound to do, he deposes her. Here the story weakens. Such a king would certainly have cut off her head.

Out of all the kingdom the most beautiful young women are now drawn to Susa, and out of this array of beauty the king selects a Jewish maiden, Esther, and installs her in the place of Queen Vashti. Her Hebrew name is Hadassah; Esther, which means the "Star of Love," or Venus, is her Persian name. She has been brought up by her cousin Mordecai, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and it is he who has secured for her this elevation, though her nationality is not known to the king.

Soon after her coronation, Mordecai was enabled through Esther to give information concerning a plot against the king's life; the king hanged the conspirators and bade Mordecai's good deed to be inscribed in the archives of the kingdom.

After this Xerxes raised to a high rank a certain Haman, and commanded all his courtiers to do obeisance to him. Mordecai would not bow, and Haman, to avenge the insult, plotted the destruction of the whole Hebrew race. The king yielded to Haman's prayer and the fatal decree was issued, to take effect eleven months from date. All the Jews, young and old, in every province, were to be massacred and their goods confiscated. The date of the massacre was fixed by lot. Now Esther, instigated by Mordecai, at the peril of her life intervenes, presenting herself, uninvited, before the king; having won his favor, she secures a promise to give her anything she asks for, even to the half of the kingdom. The result of all the dramatic complications, which I will not stop to detail, is that Haman is hanged, and Mordecai made Grand Vizier; and while, according to Oriental ethics, no royal decree could be abrogated, a supplementary decree was issued, authorizing the Jews not only to stand for their lives on the day appointed for their extinction, but to kill as many as they pleased of the Persians. The story represents that before that day came the Persians were so intimidated by the power

of Mordecai that they did not dare to touch the Jews, but simply stood still and were slaughtered by the Jews to the number of 75,000. In the palace of Susa itself 500 Persians were slain on the first day by the infuriated Jews, while not a Jew suffered, so far as we are told. After this day of blood Xerxes, apparently feeling that his fair queen must be pretty well satiated with the carnage which had been going on under her eyes, asked her if she wanted any more, and she begged that the slaughter might be permitted to go on for one more day, during which 300 more of the Persians were butchered. The ten sons of Haman had been killed the first day; and Esther stipulated also that their dead bodies might be brought forth and publicly hanged upon the gallows, all of which was done at her request, and for her delectation. The fourteenth and fifteenth days of the Jewish month Adar are kept in memory of this event as days of gladness and feasting, and of sending portions one to another. This is said to be the origin of the feast of Purim.

Two questions now arise concerning this book, — the same questions that occurred to pious Jews in Palestine when our Lord was

on the earth, and to such saints as Athanasius and Augustine and Gregory and Luther. The first question is whether this is a true narration of historical events, and the second whether the conduct which the book evidently approves is right conduct. Is the moral teaching of the book sound teaching? And this is the main question. The book might be a historical romance, founded on fact, — as some books of the Bible undoubtedly are, — and still be highly useful because of the good instruction which it conveyed. The fact that the story of the Prodigal Son is a work of imagination in nowise affects its value. For purposes of inspiration no fact that ever occurred is worth more to the world than this bit of fiction. If the book of Esther were proved to be largely a work of the imagination, containing historical inaccuracies and scientific improbabilities, its usefulness would not be discredited provided its representation of the great truths of conduct and character were true and right. But if the impression which the book is calculated to make upon the mind respecting human conduct is a wrong impression, if its standards are low, if its ideals are false, then it is not of much use to try to prove that it is historically true.

The fact that the book recites wicked and bloody deeds does not condemn it. Wicked and bloody deeds are often occurring and must sometimes be rehearsed. Other books of the Bible relate to us great impieties and atrocities, but they are ordinarily related in such a way that our moral judgment is called forth against them. David committed a great sin; but he was rebuked for it by the prophet and humbly confessed it. The writers who tell these stories ordinarily make us feel that they approve the good and condemn the evil. It is not always true, as we have seen, but it is generally true. Is this the fact respecting the writer of the book of Esther?

Those for whom I am writing have read the book, and can answer for themselves. For my part, I think that those pious Jews of the first century, and those Christian fathers and reformers of later centuries, who denied that this book was inspired of God, were entirely right.

In the first place, the absence of the religious element is notable. Not only is the name of God absent from the book, there is no mention of any religious act or exercise except the fasting of Esther. Prayer is not

alluded to; there is no reference to temple or altar or sacrifice. By one of Mordecai's remarks — "Who knoweth but thou hast come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" — a belief in Providence is suggested. "The point of view," says Dr. Driver, "is throughout purely secular; the preservation of the race as such, and its worldly greatness, not the perpetuation and diffusion of its religion, are the objects in which the author's interest is manifestly centred." [1]

But it is less because of a lack of religiousness than because of a bad morality that the book falls under condemnation.

That a petulant courtier like Haman should have plotted the destruction of the Jews is not impossible, and the heroic efforts of Mordecai and Esther to avert this calamity might have entitled them to praise. But the kind of vengeance which they are said to have induced this despot to inflict upon the Persian people admits of no justification. The intended massacre of their race appears to have been instigated solely by Haman; there is no intimation that any other Persian had any part in it; indeed, there is a sentence which seems to mean that the people of

[1] *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 457.

Persia were horrified at the decree. When it was published, it is said that "the city Shushan was perplexed." Yet when Haman, who is the sole instigator of this atrocity, is deposed and hanged, and Mordecai is made prime minister in his place, Mordecai and Esther proceed to slaughter 75,000 of these innocent Persians, as vengeance for a deed that was never done by anybody, and which those who were murdered do not appear to have even thought of doing. We are given to understand that this 75,000 included not only Persian men, but "their little ones and their women."[1] All this appears to the

[1] A sample of the curiosities of exegesis is seen in the attempt of some of the interpreters to make out that the phrase "little ones and women," in viii. 11, is grammatically the object of the verb "assault," rather than of the previous verbs "destroy, slay, and cause to perish;" *i. e.*, that the decree of Mordecai did not authorize the destruction of the women and children of the Persians, but only the destruction of those Persians who were seeking to destroy *their* women and children. It is an interesting example of the lengths to which traditionalism can go in twisting language for the concealment of troublesome facts. The fact that the decree of Mordecai is intended to be an exact duplication of the decree of Haman (iii. 13), and that it permits the Jews to do to the Persians exactly what the Persians had been authorized to do to the Jews, can scarcely be doubted by any careful reader. The Vulgate makes the matter clear:

author of the book of Esther a highly proper and praiseworthy proceeding.

Much is made by the apologists for the book of the fact that the terms of the decree authorize nothing more than self-defense on the part of the Jews. It is evident that this is what the writer set out to say; but in telling the tale his imagination was permitted a loose rein, and he ended by representing the Persians as standing utterly cowed and helpless before the onset of the Jews. Besides, he tells us that the power of Mordecai was so great and universal that the whole force of the kingdom was on the side of the Jews; this does not sound like a story of self-defense: —

"The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces

"Omnes inimicos suos, cum conjugibus ac liberis, et universis domibus, interficerent et delerent." Nearly all the most conservative commentators give the text this interpretation, though some of them assert that the Jews did not carry this part of the decree into execution. Their authority for this assertion they carefully conceal from us. Indeed, the sparing of women and children in such a massacre would be an exceptional occurrence. The text of the decree describes what was customary in the wars of that period, and what was abundantly authorized by the Jewish Scriptures in the extermination of the Canaanites.

of the King Ahasuerus to lay hand on such as sought their hurt; and no man could withstand them, for the fear of them was fallen upon all the people. And all the princes of the provinces and the satraps and the governors and they that did the king's business helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them. For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went forth throughout all the provinces, for the man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. And the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and with slaughter and destruction, and did what they would unto all that hated them. And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men." [1]

And when, after the first days' carnage in the palace, Esther begs that the slaughter may go on before her eyes another day, the writer sees in this gross savagery nothing to disapprove. The book contains no syllable which intimates that Mordecai and Esther were actuated by an improper spirit, or that they overstepped the limits of justice and righteousness. It is sometimes said by

[1] Chap. ix. 2–6.

the apologists that the book is a colorless record, neither praising nor censuring the acts it narrates; but every reader knows that Mordecai and Esther represent the writer's ideals of human virtue.

The Christian teacher who represents this book as teaching a sound morality or as expressing the mind of the Divine Spirit takes upon himself a heavy responsibility.

If the book is not a safe guide in morals or religion, it would be, as I have said already, quite absurd to argue that it is historically infallible. If the spirit which inspired it does not teach sound morals, we need not expect it to teach the truth about history. And there is plenty of evidence that the book is a historical fiction and one which makes very free with facts.

There is good reason for doubting that Xerxes ever had a queen by the name of Esther. His queen between the seventh and the twelfth years of his reign was Amestris. We know much about her, and it is not likely that she would have tolerated a rival. Moreover the book represents Esther as *the* queen, and the only queen. She might have been a favorite of the monarch; his queen she certainly was not.

The manner in which the queen is selected in this story is also contrary to the historical fact; the Persian king was required to choose his queen from one of six noble families; and the laws of the Medes and the Persians in matters of this kind were not likely to be tampered with.

In fact, all that is related about the decree for the massacre of the Jews which was *not* executed, and the decree for the massacre of the Persians which *was*, taxes our credulity. Xerxes was a somewhat irresponsible monarch, but we can hardly imagine that even he would order the extermination of a whole race; for Palestine was at that time a Persian dependency, and the slaughter must have involved the Jews in Palestine as well as those dwelling in Persia, — not less than two millions of people. Nor can we quite believe that this Jewish prime minister could have so completely terrorized the warlike Persians that when their turn came they should have tamely stood still and been slaughtered by the Jews, to the number of seventy-five thousand, without lifting a finger to defend themselves, — especially when they knew that they were wholly undeserving of this vengeance.

On the whole, we are justified, on many grounds, in doubting whether anything just like this ever happened in Susa or anywhere else. There may have been an attempted slaughter of Jews in Persia, which was foiled by the courage and devotion of some Jewish maiden in the court of the king; but many fictitious embellishments have probably been added to the story by this writer. "Though," says Dr. Driver, "the narrative cannot reasonably be doubted to have a historical basis, it includes items that are not strictly historical; the elements of the narrative were supplied to the writer by tradition, and, aided by his knowledge of Persian life and customs, he combined them into a consistent picture; in some cases the details were colored already by tradition before they came to the author's hand, in other cases they owe their present form to the author's love of dramatic effect. An evident collateral aim of the narrative is to magnify the importance and influence of the Jews. . . . It is in some of the details connected with his picture of the Jews that the author's narrative is most open to the suspicion of exaggeration. It is probable, in fact, that the danger which threatened

the Jews was a local one, and that the massacre which they wrought upon their foes was on a much smaller scale than is represented." [1]

Upon the historical and critical questions here involved, many of us would feel disinclined to venture an opinion, but any of us may have an opinion upon the moral teaching of the book; and if the author is convicted of grave error in this respect, it is rather superfluous to claim for him historical inerrancy.

There are traits in the narrative which win our approval. The stanch patriotism of Mordecai and Esther; their passionate grief over the disaster that threatens their people; the heroism of Esther in taking her life in her hand and venturing into the king's presence, saying, "If I perish, I perish," — all this is exemplary and noble. If the writer could have contented himself with making Esther and Mordecai the rescuers of their people (we could have justified him in getting Haman happily hanged in the operation), the book might have been as precious as Jewish national partiality has represented it to be; but the last three

[1] *Introduction*, pp. 453, 454.

chapters are the expression of a moral sentiment which is utterly at war, not only with the ethics of the New Testament, but with the teaching of the Old Testament as well. Ewald is right when he says that "in passing to Esther from other books of the *Old Testament* we pass from heaven to earth."

The book is here in the Bible, and it has its uses. There is no other book in the Bible that it is so hard to account for; there is none which needs to be handled so carefully; nevertheless it has its uses.

It is useful, for one thing, as a standing illustration of how little Jewish tradition is worth in deciding a question of inspiration.

It is useful as a picture of an Oriental court; for in spite of the exaggerations respecting the details of the massacres, the representation of life at the court of Xerxes in the palace of Susa is probably substantially correct.

Above all, it is useful as showing us the kind of character that has passed for an ideal of womanhood in former ages. There is reason to fear that many Christian readers have suffered some confusion of their

moral sense in reading the sympathetic delineation of the character of this author's heroine. Vashti is the character which most demands our sympathy, but the art of the writer seeks to transfer all our affection to Esther. To take the view of this character which the author of this book intends us to take is quite impossible for any one who knows anything of Christian morality: but on the supposition that the writer of this book is inspired of God, his view of the character must of course be taken.

It is not good for us to try to justify or to excuse such conduct as this, or to think about it in the way that the author of this book thinks about it. And we may say that this book is chiefly useful as a dark background on which we may see more clearly the brightness of the Christian morality. The character of Esther serves us best when we think of it as a type of womanhood, once deemed admirable, which Jesus Christ has made it impossible for us to regard with any other feelings than wonder and pity. Perhaps his eye was on this book when He said: "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy, but I say unto you love your

enemies, and pray for them that persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He maketh his sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and the unjust."

IV

JOB

The book of Job consists of five parts. The first part, or prologue, which occupies the first two chapters, is in prose. It introduces to us a man of Uz, an Arabian emir of great wealth and probity, "the greatest of all the sons of the East,"—a man who was "perfect and upright, one who feared God and eschewed evil. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheep and three thousand camels and four hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred she asses and a very great household." He is represented as a man of great piety, careful to observe not only the law of righteousness, but the ceremonial requirements as well.

From this glimpse of a great and fortunate human personality, the scene suddenly changes to the heavenly courts where Jehovah is seated on his throne, and "the sons

of God," who appear to be his angelic attendants, present themselves before Him. "And Satan came also among them." This Satan of the Book of Job is by no means the Prince of Darkness of whom we read in later Scriptures; he is that one of the officials of the court of heaven whose duty it is to question the claims of men to the favor of God, and to prevent the unworthy from sharing his blessings. The conversation between Jehovah and Satan respecting the character of Job is reported. Jehovah asserts the integrity of his servant Job; Satan questions it, asserting that Job is not disinterested; that adversity would disturb his loyalty. Jehovah gives Satan full power to test the patriarch's character by the direst calamities; but when all his vast wealth has been swept away and his sons and daughters have been torn from him, his answer is, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Again the council of heaven is convened, and the Adversary returns to confess himself foiled by Job's fidelity, but to urge that the infliction upon him of the terrible physical curse of *elephantiasis* will weaken his allegiance. Still Job endures his suffer-

ing without outcry. Months pass by; his condition is known to all his friends. At last three of them came to visit him, "every one from his own place: Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to bemoan him and to comfort him. And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice and wept. And they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground, seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him, for they saw that his grief was great."

Thus ends the prologue. The second part comprises the body of the book, and is in poetry. It is a great debate, a series of speeches, in which Job's three friends discuss with him the significance of his calamities. This dialogue is introduced by a solemn malediction pronounced by Job upon the day of his birth. Then follow three cycles of speeches, each cycle consisting of six. Each of the three friends delivers his thought, and is replied to by Job. Eliphaz speaks and Job answers; then Bildad speaks and

Job answers: then Zophar speaks and Job answers. And this order is thrice repeated, although, owing to some errors and transpositions of copyists, the last triplet appears in our Bibles to be an imperfect one.

After these three rounds of high debate, another character introduces himself and with himself the third part of the book. It is Elihu, who is represented as a young man with ideas of his own on this transcendent theme. He has been listening to the others and conceives that he can add something to what has been said. In the midst of his speech a storm has been gathering, and out of the storm and the whirlwind is heard the voice of the Almighty rebuking the superficialities of all who have spoken, and flooding the whole theme with light from the eternities. The sublime utterance of the Most High constitutes the fourth part of the book.

When this august voice has ceased we hear, in the silence, a few contrite words from Job, and then follows the fifth part of the book, the epilogue, in prose, which narrates the restoration to Job of health and prosperity. The three self-constituted censors are rebuked by Jehovah for not speak-

ing the thing that is right concerning God as his servant Job has done. His friends now return to him, and eat bread in his house; every man brings him a piece of money and every man a ring of gold. "So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: and he had fourteen thousand sheep and six thousand camels and a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first Jemimah, the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren. And after this Job lived a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons and his sons' sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days."

The first question before us is whether this book is a recital of facts which actually occurred and a report of speeches actually made, or whether it is a work of the imagination. The general belief has been that it is purely historical; that a man named Job lived in the land of Uz, which is supposed to have been the northern part of Arabia;

that the conversation concerning him between Jehovah and Satan actually took place as here reported: that the calamities here narrated overtook him, exactly as here described; that then his three friends whose names are accurately given came and sat silent with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, after which the colloquy here given took place in the words here recited.

This theory of the book, which has been held, I suppose, for substance, by most Protestant readers, is burdened with some difficulties. In the first place, all the narrative portions seem to be constructed after an ideal or artificial plan; it seems remarkable that in each of the four great catastrophes by which his property was swept away and his family destroyed, there was just one survivor left to tell the tale. God's providences do not ordinarily operate by a rule so exact and mathematical. It seems also remarkable that in the two reported conversations between the Almighty and the Adversary, exactly the same words should have been used each time. The constant use of the symbolical numbers, three, five and seven; and the statement that after his restoration

he had exactly as many children as he had before, the sexes being represented as before, while his flocks and herds numbered exactly twice as many, indicates that we are not dealing with historical occurrences, but with a work of the imagination.

Furthermore, it is not at all probable that four real men ever came together, in any country in any age, and talked to one another after the manner of these four men. For this is poetry of the most elaborate and ornate character; it represents the finest kind of literary art, and men do not carry on conversations in language of this description, no matter how cultivated they may be nor how deeply they may be moved by thought or passion. Scott gives us in "The Lady of the Lake" some animated conversations between Fitz James and Roderick Dhu; but I suppose that no reader imagines that the two chiefs — if they ever existed — really talked to each other in just that language, in perfect rhythm and resounding rhyme. Shakespeare gives us in Julius Cæsar some eloquent controversy between Brutus, Cassius, Marc Antony, and others; but we do not conceive that it is a stenographic report of what was said on those occasions. When we find

language of this description put into the mouths of men in a book, we do not, outside of the Bible, ordinarily suppose that we are reading the very words of the speakers.

But it may be said that these were inspired men; and that if God inspires a man, He can just as well inspire him to talk poetry as plain prose. To this it may be replied that these men, according to the story itself, could not have been inspired. Leaving Job out of the account for the present, we may safely affirm that Eliphaz the Temanite was not an inspired man; neither was Bildad the Shuhite, nor Zophar the Naamathite. These characters are all, in the last part of the book, sharply rebuked by Jehovah himself for having darkened counsel by words without knowledge; for having spoken concerning God the thing that was not right. Their whole line of argument is condemned and set aside by the Almighty Himself. We can hardly suppose that God inspired them to speak error and then rebuked them for speaking it. No: there could have been nothing supernatural about the speech of these men, if, according to the supposition we are now considering, they were real men. And real

men do not, without supernatural aid, make use in conversation of language like this. The dialogue, as Dr. Driver says, "contains far too much thought and argument to have been extemporized on the occasion, and is manifestly the studied product of the author's leisurely reflection."

It seems almost puerile to argue a point like this; and yet the suggestion that we are dealing here with a great dramatic poem — a work of the imagination — is regarded by many pious people at this day with consternation. A neighboring pastor told me of the alarm which a remark of this kind created among his flock. "Job a dramatic poem! A dramatic poem in the Bible!" There are those to whom a statement of this nature appears to be little short of blasphemy. They want to know if you think that the book is all a lie. No: it is not all a lie. Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" is not all a lie. The story of the Good Samaritan is not all a lie. The author of the Book of Job was not telling lies when he fashioned the framework of this story and constructed the simple dramatic machinery by means of which his great thoughts were to be set forth. Undoubtedly

he supposed that his book would be read by persons of ordinary common sense. Probably it never once entered his mind that anybody would ever take his work for a literal history, any more than it occurred to Shakespeare, when he wrote "The Tempest," that any one would accept it as a recital of facts which actually occurred, and of speeches which were really made. Outside of the Bible we are able, usually, to use our reasoning powers in the interpretation of literature; very small children soon learn to distinguish between fact and fancy. It is high time that we had learned that the collection of books which we call the Bible contains a great many kinds of literature, — history, law, philosophy, poetry, essays, sermons, stories, — and that we must learn to apply to each the canons appropriate for the judgment of that class of writings to which it clearly belongs. We must not read hymns as if they were sermons, or essays as if they were laws, or fiction as if it were history. We must try to get the point of view of the writer, and understand the purpose he has in view, and the method by which he is working. When we are once able to get into our minds a few of

these very rudimentary ideas about literary form, we shall be able to realize that the author of the Book of Job is neither a historian nor a liar, but a poet, a great dramatic poet, who is able to use his art, under divine inspiration, for the most sublime purposes.

There has been much speculation about the date at which the poem was written, and the matter is not well settled. It is an interesting but not an important question. My own opinion is that it was written during or after the exile, — that it is a comparatively late book. Respecting its authorship we have absolutely no knowledge. There was an old tradition that Moses wrote it, which is of course even more absurd than the theory that Bacon wrote the plays of Shakespeare. It must have been written long after the people of Israel had dwelt in their own land. Walled cities are familiar to the writer; he lives in a community of which kings, princes, nobles, counsellors, judges, are the ornaments; there must be a settled government. "Courts," says Mr. Raymond, "are called by notice given: criminals are arrested; complaints are heard; lawsuits are conducted concerning disputed

inheritances; the magistrate, sitting in the gate, makes summary judgment; witnesses testify; sureties are offered for accused parties; accusers present their charges in writing; the prison and the stocks await the condemned, or capital punishment is inflicted by the sword. . . . Yet the tone of society seems to be demoralized. The judges are bribed by the rich to wrong the poor; the sins denounced in public are practiced secretly; slaves are cruelly wronged; the victims of power are oppressed; men admire and are fain to imitate the successful tyrant." [1] All this is found in the book itself, in picture and simile and allusion. Such a state of society was present to the mind of the writer, and also to the minds of those for whom he wrote, else his book would not have been intelligible to them. This takes us down into the time of the kingdom, and probably to the later years of the kingdom.

It is, however, remarkable that the whole ecclesiastical and liturgical machinery of the Jewish church is ignored by this writer. It did not suit his purposes to deal with the ritualistic side of religion; he was studying

[1] *The Book of Job*, pp. 31, 32.

a question in which the introduction of that element would only confuse thought; he shows his great skill in passing it by.

When we speak of this as a dramatic poem, and a work of the imagination, it is not necessary to deny that it may have a historical foundation. "Hamlet" rests on a historical foundation; so does "Macbeth;" yet they are works of imagination. "The Ring and the Book" is founded on fact; Mr. Browning dug the substance of the story out of an old law report. In Ezekiel Job is referred to as if he were a well-known person. It is possible, of course, that the allusion here may be literary. We often speak of Polonius, or Colonel Newcome, or Mr. Pickwick as though they were real characters. It is, however, altogether probable that Job was an historical person, and that traditions concerning him were current among the Jews. "To determine," says Dr. Driver, "precisely what elements in the book belong to tradition is, of course, no longer possible. But probably tradition told at least as much as that Job, a man of exceptional piety, was overtaken by unparalleled misfortunes; that he broke out into complaint against God's providence, and refused to be

satisfied or calmed by the arguments of his friends, but that he never absolutely discarded his faith in God, and was finally restored to his former prosperity. This history is made by the author of the book the vehicle for expounding his new thoughts on the religious and ethical significance of suffering." [1]

For this is the great theme of the book. Job, as the prologue tells us, bore the heavy calamities that befell him without a word of murmuring. He did not understand this dispensation, but he was silent; he could have said of himself what the Psalmist said: "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." But when his three friends came and sat down around him on the ground and looked at him for seven days without opening their lips, he lost control of himself and cursed, not God, but his own bitter existence: —

"Let the day perish wherein I was born,
And the night which said, there is a man child conceived.
Let that day be darkness;
Let not God regard it from above,
Neither let the light shine upon it!
Let darkness and the shadow of death claim it for their own;

[1] *Introduction*, p. 387.

Let a cloud dwell upon it!
Let all that maketh black the day terrify it!
. . . . . .
Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery
And life unto the bitter in soul?
Which long for death, but it cometh not,
And dig for it more than for hid treasures,
Which rejoice exceedingly
And are glad when they can find the grave."

This outburst of Job's passionate complaining unmuzzles his three friends, and they proceed, in order, to deal out to him their admonition. For as Dr. Davidson says, they had not come simply for purposes of condolence. "Along with their pity they had brought their theology with them, and they trusted to heal Job's malady with this." We may picture the characters of these three friends, as revealed in their words.

"Eliphaz," says Canon Cook, "represents the true patriarchal chieftain, grave and dignified, and erring only from an exclusive adherence to tenets hitherto unquestioned, and influenced in the first place by a genuine regard for Job and sympathy with his affliction. Bildad, without much originality or independence of character, reposes partly on the wise laws of antiquity, partly on the authority of his older friend. Zophar differs from both; he seems to be a young

man; his language is violent and at some times even coarse and offensive. He represents the prejudiced and narrow-minded bigots of his age." That is one conjecture. You can judge for yourselves whether it is reasonable. The theology which the three friends have brought with them assumes that human suffering is always the penalty of sin; that the existence of suffering is therefore the clear indication of sin; that Job's great afflictions prove him to be a great sinner, and that he ought to repent and humble himself before God that his sins may be forgiven and his sufferings removed. So Eliphaz urges in his first speech: —

"Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent,
Or when were the upright cut off?
According as I have seen, they that plow iniquity
And sow trouble, they reap the same.
By the breath of God they perish
And by the blast of his anger are they consumed."
. . . . . .
As for me I would seek unto God,
And unto God would I commit my cause."
. . . . . .
Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth;
Therefore despise not the chastening of the Almighty,
For he maketh sore and bindeth up,
He woundeth, and his hands make whole."

Beginning in this rather diplomatic man-

ner, these three friends press upon Job, through thirty chapters of this book, their theory that his sufferings are evidence of grievous iniquity for which he should be duly penitent.

Job answers all this pious exhortation sternly and stoutly and bitterly. He does not, probably, intend to deny that he sometimes errs, though he does apply to himself the adjective "perfect" with which he is described in the first verse of the book. But he knows that he is not such a sinner above all others, as that he should suffer these unparalleled disasters and miseries. He maintains his own integrity. He denies that these evils can have been justly inflicted upon him by his Maker. The doctrine that all suffering is punishment he indignantly repudiates. And when his friends press it upon him more and strenuously he rouses himself and denies more hotly than a good man should. Bildad has said,

> "Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man,
> Neither will he uphold the evil doers."

Nay, says Job: —

> "He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked;
> If the scourge slay suddenly,
> He will mock at the calamity of the innocent.
> The earth is given into the hand of the wicked."

To this fact of the success and prosperity of bad men Job returns again and again. His friends keep asserting that the good are always prosperous and the wicked always unfortunate, and Job with the utmost vehemence denies it.

"Wherefore do the wicked live,
Become old, yea wax mighty in power?
Their seed is established with them in their sight,
And their offspring before their eyes.
Their houses are safe from fear,
Neither is the rod of God upon them.
They send forth their little ones like a flock,
And their children dance.
They sing to the timbrel and harp,
And rejoice at the sound of the pipe.
. . . . . .
Yet they said unto God, Depart from us,
For we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

Job loses all patience with his three friends because they refuse to recognize this palpable truth. He more than intimates that their words are cant; that they are sycophants in the presence of the Almighty Power. And his exasperation with their special pleading is such that he is driven into an attitude of bitter complaining not only against his fate, but against God, who has suffered these calamities to come upon him.

"God delivereth me to the ungodly,
And casteth me into the hands of the wicked.
I was at ease and he brake me asunder;
Yea he hath taken me by the neck and dashed me to pieces,
He hath also set me up for his mark,
His archers compass me round about,
He cleaveth my reins asunder and doth not spare,
He poureth out my gall upon the ground,
He breaketh me with breach upon breach,
He runneth upon me like a giant.
I have sowed sackcloth upon my skin,
And have laid my horn in the dust,
My face is foul with weeping,
And on my eyelids is the shadow of death,
Although there is no violence in mine hands
And my prayer is pure.
O earth, cover not thou my blood
And let my cry have no resting place!"

What a tragical appeal it is — to the dumb earth, to keep his blood-stains fresh in the sight of heaven, and to the vital air not to let his bitter wail die into silence!

Job recognizes the power of God; he knows that any resistance to God's power is vain; but God's justice he openly challenges. And he begs for the privilege of standing before God and pleading his own cause: —

"O that I knew where I might find him,
That I might come even to his seat.
I would order my cause before him
And fill my mouth with arguments."

Sometimes he seems to despair utterly, and some of the expressions of confidence which the old version put into his mouth are of doubtful genuineness. Thus the phrase "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," — which has so long been quoted as the triumph of his faith, — is now more carefully translated, "He will slay me; I have no hope." Yet now and then he seems to feel that an end must come to these sufferings, and that his wrongs will be righted.

"He knoweth the way that I take.
When he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold."

And in one great outburst of the larger hope he seems to see a future deliverance: —

"O that my words were inscribed in a book,
That with an iron pen and lead
They were graven in the rock forever.
But I know that my Vindicator liveth
And that he shall stand up at the last upon the earth,
And after my skin hath been thus destroyed
Yet from my flesh shall I see God,
Whom I shall see for myself
And mine eyes shall behold and not another."

This great confession of faith has usually been supposed to refer to deliverance in a future life, and this may be the meaning;

but it seems more natural to me to interpret it as the expectation of vindication here. Even though the loathsome disease from which he is suffering may destroy his skin, yet from the flesh he will behold the appearance of God as his vindicator.

The twenty-ninth, thirtieth, and thirty-first chapters contain Job's final summing up of his own case. He looks back to the day when he was loved of God and honored of men; he contrasts with that happy fortune the misery and contempt into which he is now fallen, and then he utters his last solemn and splendid assertion of his own blamelessness of life. As Dr. Driver says: "The chapter is a remarkable one; it contains the portrait of a character instinct with nobility and delicacy of feeling, which not only repudiates any overt act of violence or wrong but also disowns all secret impulses to impure or dishonorable conduct." This picture which Job here gives us of his own life is one of the noblest in all literature. It is the likeness of a gentleman, a nobleman, a pure and blameless knight of God; there is no man of this generation who could think of a higher honor than to be able with truth to repeat these words of Job: —

"If I have walked with vanity
And my foot hath hasted to deceit ;
. . . . . .
If my step hath turned out of the way
And mine heart walked after mine eyes,
And if any spot hath cleaved to my hands,
Then let me sow and another eat,
Yea let the produce of my field be rooted out.
If I did despise the cause of my manservant
Or my maidservant when they contended with me,
What then shall I do when God riseth up ?
And when he visiteth, what shall I answer him ?
Did not he that made me in the womb make him ?
. . . . . .
If I have withheld the poor from their desire,
Or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,
Or have eaten my morsel alone
And the fatherless hath not eaten thereof, —
. . . . . .
If I have seen any perish for want of clothing,
Or that the needy had no covering ;
If his loins have not blessed me,
And if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep,
If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless,
Because I saw my help in the gate ;
Then let my shoulder fall from the shoulder blade,
And mine arm be broken from the bone.
. . . . . .
If I have made gold my hope,
And have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence ;
If I rejoiced because my wealth was great
And because my hand had gotten much,
If I beheld the sun when it shined
Or the moon walking in brightness
And my heart hath been secretly enticed,
And my mouth hath kissed my hand,
This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judges :

For I should have lied to God that is above.
If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me,
Or lifted up myself when evil found him;
. . . . . .
If my land cry out against me
And the furrows thereof weep together;
If I have eaten the fruits thereof without money
Or have caused the owners thereof to lose their life:
Let thistles grow instead of wheat
And cockle instead of barley."

At the conclusion of this noble speech is the simple rubric: "The words of Job are ended."

Elihu, who seems to have been a by-stander, now steps forth, and delivers his judgment on this weighty theme. "Against Job," it is said, "his wrath was kindled, because he justified himself rather than God. Also against his three friends was his wrath kindled because they had found no answer [to Job's argument] and yet had condemned Job." Speaking thus, in his warmth, Elihu unfolds his theory, which is certainly far more reasonable than that of the three friends, that suffering is not always punitive, but that it is disciplinary; not penalty but chastening. Mr. Moulton in his analysis divides this speech into three parts: in the first he puts this theory of his in an address to Job, but Job does

not respond; then he turns to the three friends, and seeks their approval, but they are silent; then he looks up to heaven "and finds in the sky a fresh text for the greatness of God. While he is gazing upon it the sky shows signs of change and the tokens of a rising storm mingle with his words."

Finally out of the storm and the whirlwind speaks the voice of God in one of the most sublime portrayals of the wonder and majesty of the creation that has ever been uttered.

"Where wast thou when I laid the foundation of the
earth?
Declare, if thou hast understanding.
Who determined the measures thereof, if thou knowest?
Or who stretched the line upon it?
Whereupon were the foundations thereof fastened?
Or who laid the corner stone thereof
When the morning-stars sang together
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

"Or who shut up the sea with doors
When it brake forth and issued out of the womb?
When I made the cloud the garment thereof
And thick darkness a swaddling band for it,
And prescribed for it my decree
And set bars and doors
And said, Hitherto shalt thou come but no further
And here shall thy proud waves be stayed?

Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days began,
And caused the dayspring to know its place;
That it might take hold of the ends of the earth,
And the wicked be shaken out of it?
. . . . . .
Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea?
Or hast thou walked in the recesses of the deep?
Have the gates of death been revealed unto thee,
Or hast thou seen the gates of the shadow of death?
Hast thou comprehended the breadth of the earth?
Declare, if thou knowest it all.
Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
And as for darkness, where is the place thereof;
. . . . . .
Who hath cleft a channel for the waterflood,
Or a way for the lightning of the thunder,
To cause it to rain on a land where no man is,
On the wilderness where there is no man,
To satisfy the waste and desolate ground,
And to cause the tender grass to spring forth?
. . . . . .
Canst thou bind the cluster of the Pleiades
Or loose the bands of Orion?
Canst thou lead forth the signs of the Zodiac in their season?
Or canst thou guide the Bear with her train?
Knowest thou the ordinances of the heavens?
Canst thou establish the dominion thereof in the earth?
Canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds
That abundance of waters may cover thee?
Canst thou send forth lightnings that they may go,
And say unto thee, Here we are?"

The whole recital of the wonders of the creation so impresses Job with the wisdom

and greatness of the Creator that he is awed into silence and humility. The problem of suffering has not been solved, but the truth is borne into his mind that the universe is too vast for a mortal to criticise, that he can comprehend neither its evil nor its good. The conclusion to which he is forced is that which Carlyle says will overpower the mind of any man, if he will stop and think about it, — that the Creation is "an unspeakable, godlike thing, towards which the best attitude for us, after never so much science, is awe, devout prostration, and humility of soul, — worship, if not in words, then in silence."

And this is really the lesson of the book. Job's friends are sharply reproved by Jehovah, in the epilogue, for not having said about him the thing that is right; and Job, though rebuked by Jehovah for his temerity in challenging the divine justice, is commended for refusing to believe that the sufferings of men are always a sign of God's displeasure. Why good men suffer, the book does not tell us; it states the whole problem with wonderful breadth, but it leaves us with the understanding that the reasons, in any given case, are apt to be shrouded in mystery; that there is nothing

for us to do but to put our trust in the infinite wisdom and goodness.

Thus it appears that the Divine Wisdom is represented as sweeping aside the whole argument of the thirty-five preceding chapters, — not only the theology of the three friends, but in large part also Job's answers. Of course much truth has been uttered by all these speakers; many wise and beautiful things have been said by all of them, for much truth may be uttered in support of a false proposition; it is true, but it does not apply to the case in hand; truth is stated, but false conclusions are drawn from it. The three friends had spoken many wise words, and Job had spoken some unwise ones; none of them was wholly right. The testimony of Jehovah declares that in the main contention Job has been nearer right than his friends have been. But the whole controversy had been on the wrong track and had failed of disentangling the truth. If the author of this book expresses in any part of it the mind of the Holy Spirit, it is probable that he expresses it in the words which he puts into the mouth of Jehovah; and if these words are true, the thirty-five chapters preceding them are certainly not infallible

teaching. There is a great deal that is true and beautiful in them, but we must learn how to separate the truth from the error with which it is mingled.

The great lesson of the book is, as I have said, that God's ways are inscrutable ; that we cannot always interpret his providences ; that good men suffer in this world as well as evil men ; that when one is overtaken by sudden misfortune we have no right to conclude that God is angry with him, or that he is any greater sinner than his prosperous neighbors.

But there is another lesson not much less important. Professor Moulton states it thus : " The strong faith of Job which could even reproach God, as a friend reproaches a friend, was more acceptable to Him than the servile adoration which sought to twist the truth in order to magnify God." And Professor Green of Princeton thus states it : The three friends " had really inculpated the providence of God by their professed defense of it. By disingenuously covering up and ignoring its enigmas and seeming contradictions they had cast more discredit upon it than Job by honestly holding them up to the light. Their denial of its appar-

ent inequalities was more untrue and more dishonoring to the divine administration, as it is in fact conducted, than Job's bold affirmation of them."

Wise words are these, sound words, pertinent and timely words. Lying for God is a poor way of proving your loyalty to Him.

Does not the same principle apply to the current discussion about the Bible? Are not those who are "disingenuously covering up and ignoring its enigmas and seeming contradictions" casting "more discredit upon it" than are those who are "honestly holding them up to the light"? Is not the denial of its palpable inaccuracies and human elements more dishonorable to the Bible than the bold affirmation of them? Is it not, in short, as safe to tell the truth about God's book as about God's providence? There are those who suppose that they are showing their reverence for the Bible by quibbling and evasion, and the concealment of the truth. But the Bible itself, through the book of Job, by the very lips of the Most High, administers to these shifty defenders a sharp rebuke. It is to be hoped that they will heed it.

I am conscious that I have given to this noble book but a lame and fragmentary treatment. Very little of its beauty and inspiration have I been able to bring you; for though these words are largely the speech of erring men, they are words out of which we can draw a great deal of divine wisdom. The whole atmosphere of the book is pure and quickening; how different from that of Esther or of the Judges! We are lifted to a lofty plane of thought; we are confronted with the sublimest realities; we are awed and humbled and comforted. One can quite assent to Carlyle's strong assertion that "there is nothing written, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit," and the spiritual power is not less than the literary beauty. "One feels indeed," he says, "as if it were not Hebrew; such a noble universality, different from noble patriotism or sectarianism, dwells in it. A noble book; all men's book! It is our first, oldest statement of the never-ending problem — man's destiny, and God's ways with him here on this earth. And all in such free, flowing outlines; grand in its sincerity, in its simplicity, in its epic melody and repose of reconcilement. There is the seeing eye, the

mildly understanding heart. So true every way; true eyesight and vision for all things, material things no less than spiritual; the horse, — hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? he laughs at the shaking of the spear! Such living likenesses were never since drawn. Sublime sorrow, sublime reconciliation; oldest choral melody as of the heart of mankind, — so soft and great; as the summer midnight, as the world with its seas and stars." [1]

[1] *On Heroes*, Lecture II.

V

ECCLESIASTES

The Hebrew name of the book of Ecclesiastes is *Koheleth*. It is derived from a verb which means to assemble, to call together; it appears, therefore, to have something to do with a congregation. Some of the old interpreters, as Luther, conceived that it must describe the presiding officer or teacher of the congregation; hence Luther called the Book "*Prediger*," or Preacher, — "*Der Prediger Salomo*." Our old version follows this rendering, and calls Koheleth Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher. It is an open question whether this conveys the true meaning of the Hebrew. Perhaps the assembly alluded to meets not for instruction, but for discussion; and Koheleth may, as Plumptre suggests, mean debater or reasoner, rather than preacher, — one who discusses with some philosophic bent the great question whether life is worth living.

It has been assumed that Ecclesiastes, or

Koheleth, is King Solomon. That was the Jewish tradition, and Christian scholars of a former day generally accepted it. One of the things, however, that modern scholarship has found out is that Jewish tradition is not always trustworthy. When we examine the reasons given in the ancient Jewish writings for the acceptance of these traditions, we often discover that they are baseless; they rest, in many instances, on the most fantastic and whimsical evidences. The fact that Jewish tradition ascribes the book to Solomon is not, then, conclusive evidence that he wrote it. But the book itself, it is said, names him as its author. Its first sentence is, "The words of Koheleth, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." No other son of David but Solomon was ever king in Jerusalem. And in the twelfth verse of the first chapter we read: "I, Koheleth, was king over Israel in Jerusalem." This explicit testimony of the writer, it is argued, must settle the question, proving that the author of the book was Solomon, the son of David, king of Jerusalem.

But the speaker, in any literary work, is not always the writer. David Copperfield is the speaker in the book that bears that

name, but the book was not written by David Copperfield. Even if a book bears the name of a historical person, and that person is represented as speaking, we do not always know that this person wrote the book. Fra Lippo Lippi is a historical person; I have seen pictures that he painted; and there is a poem which bears his name, and in which he is represented as speaking, but he did not write the poem. Robert Browning wrote it. The same is true of many poems of Browning in which historical persons are the sole speakers, — Andrea del Sarto, Saul, Rabbi Ben Ezra, and others. And a more significant instance is found in the Apology of Socrates, familiar to most of us, — the death song of one of the noblest spirits that has lived on the earth. This apology is all in the first person, and Socrates is the speaker; but the writer of the book is not Socrates, it is Plato. Doubtless Plato gives us the spirit of the last plea of Socrates, but it is in his own language. Now it is certainly possible that we have in this book of Ecclesiastes an example of this form of literature, in which a historical person is made the mouthpiece of the author, through whom he expresses his views of life.

In the case of this book, as in that of Job, a crude and ignorant literalism has obscured the origin of the book, and given vogue for centuries to theories which are even childishly erroneous. It has been asserted that if the book is not the work of Solomon, it is a literary imposture. But Dean Plumptre has all literature behind him when he says: "With some writers of the highest genius, as with Robert Browning or Tennyson, a monologue or soliloquy of this character has been a favorite form of composition. The speeches in Herodotus and Thucydides, the Apologies written in the name of Socrates by Xenophon and Plato, the Dialogues of Plato throughout, are instances in which no one would dream of imputing fraud to the writers, though in all these cases we have, with scarcely the shadow of a doubt, the words of the writers and not of the men whom they represent as speaking. The most decisive, and in that sense crucial instance of such authorship is found, however, in the book which presents so striking a parallel to Ecclesiastes, the Apocryphal 'Wisdom of Solomon.' There also, both in the title and the body of the book, the writer identifies himself with the Son of David. It was

quoted by early Greek and Latin Fathers as by Solomon. . . . No one now dreams of ascribing it to Solomon. No one has ever ventured to characterize it as a fraudulent imposture. It has been quoted reverentially by many Protestant writers, cited as Scripture by many of the Fathers, placed by the Church of Rome in the Canon of Scripture, and recognized by Church of England critics as entitled to a high place of honor among the books which they receive as deutero-canonical." [1]

It is possible, then, to regard this book as the work of some later author, who has chosen to put his own thoughts into the mouth of Solomon. Let us see whether there are any facts which support this hypothesis.

If Solomon the great king of Israel did write this book, is it not somewhat strange that in all the books of the Bible written after Solomon's day — the histories, the books of the prophets — there is not a single reference or allusion to it? Does it not seem probable that if any writings of their greatest king had been in existence, they would

[1] "Introduction to Ecclesiastes," in Cambridge Bible, pp. 20, 21.

have been known to these prophets and historians, and that some one of them would have been apt to allude to them? But you search the Old Testament in vain for any reference to this book. "Absolutely the first external evidence which we have of its existence," says Dean Plumptre, "is found in a Talmudic report of a discussion (during the century before the birth of Christ) between the two schools of Hillel and of Schammai, as to its admission into the Canon of the Sacred Books. It was debated under the singular form of the question whether the Song of Songs and Koheleth polluted the hands, — *i. e.* whether they were so sacred that it was a sacrilege for common or unclean hands to touch them. Some took one side, some another. . . . Different rabbis held different opinions. So again another Talmudic tract reports that the 'wise men wanted to declare Koheleth apocryphal because its statements contradicted each other,' — and that they did so because 'they found in it sentiments that tended to infidelity.'" [1] Is it probable that a book which had come down from the age of Solomon, with the clear testimony of his author-

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

ship, and had for nine centuries been attributed to him, would, in the century before Christ, have been attacked and challenged in this way by the Jewish rabbis? As Dr. Plumptre says: "Such a discussion, in such a case, would have been an example of a bold criticism which has no parallel in the history of that period of Jewish thought."

The book itself contains certain statements which are inconsistent with the theory of a Solomonic authorship. In the first chapter we read: "I, Koheleth, *was* king over Israel in Jerusalem." How could Solomon have written that? Was there a time in his life when he was *not* king? "The tense of the verb in 'I *was* king over Israel' can only carry the sense 'I was king, but am king no more.'"[1] He says: "I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I have gotten me great wisdom above *all that were before me* in Jerusalem. . . . Also I had great possessions of herds and flocks above all that were before me in Jerusalem." But there had been no one before Solomon in Jerusalem except his father, who captured the stronghold and held it during his reign. "All" is a strange word for Solomon to

[1] Cox's *Ecclesiastes*, p. 15.

use in such a connection. The expression is one that a later writer, looking back on a long line of kings who had reigned in Jerusalem, might have carelessly used; but it could not have been employed by Solomon.

Could Solomon have written this? "Moreover I saw under the sun in the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness that wickedness was there. Then I returned, and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun; and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they have no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power, but there was no comforter." Could a powerful monarch have spoken in this bitter and complaining way of the injustice and oppression which were going on in his own realm, which he had ample power to prevent, and which it was his duty to detect and punish?

The whole picture of society in this book indicates a period very different from that of the golden days of Solomon. "The political situation described in the book," says Plumptre, "the hierarchy of officials, the tyranny, extortion, and corruption of pro-

vinces, the supreme authority of the great king, practically issuing in the despotism of a queen, a minister, or a slave, the revelry and luxury of the court, all are painted with a vividness which implies experience of misgovernment such as that which meets us in Nehemiah and Esther,"[1] in the days of the Persian domination, or in the still later days of the Greek tyranny. "The author of Koheleth," says Driver, "evinces no kingly or national feeling; he lives in a period of political servitude, destitute of patriotism or enthusiasm. When he alludes to kings he views them from below, as one of the people suffering from their misrule. His pages reflect the depression produced by the corruption of an Oriental despotism, with its injustice, its capriciousness, its revolutions, its system of spies, its hopelessness of reform. He must have lived when the Jews had lost their national independence and formed but a province of the Persian Empire; perhaps even later, when they had passed under the rule of the Greeks. But he adopts a literary disguise, and puts his meditations into the mouth of the king whose reputation it was to have been the

[1] *Ecclesiastes*, p. 30.

great sage and philosopher of the Hebrew race."[1]

These are probabilities drawn from the book itself, which tend to establish its late origin. But there is something more than probability. The Hebrew scholars tell us that the book could not have been written in the days of Solomon; that the forms of the language forbid the supposition. Words, idioms, constructions are used which did not exist in the time of Solomon. Those who know something about the growth of their own language know that it has passed through many stages of development, and that there are great differences between the early and the modern English. Not to go back to Chaucer and Mandeville, it is not difficult for those who are not great scholars to distinguish the English of Thomas More and Melville and Ascham and Spenser and Sidney from that of Coleridge and Macaulay and Arthur Helps and Matthew Arnold. One of these later writers might imitate an earlier one; but one of the earlier ones could by no means have written in the style of one of the later ones, because many of the words used by these later ones did not

[1] *Introduction*, p. 441.

exist in the times of the earlier ones, and the forms of many of the words used by both writers have greatly changed, and syntatic constructions and locutions have come into vogue in later times which the earlier writers never heard. If, therefore, Ruskin's "Crown of Wild Olive," or Arnold's "On Translating Homer," had been published first in England with the name of Francis Bacon or Walter Raleigh appended, and with the announcement that it was a posthumous work of the old writer, never before printed, any fairly bright High School pupil could have told you, in five minutes, that the work was pseudepigraphic, that the name had been feigned; because no man in the sixteenth century could have written that kind of English. Now it is by evidence of precisely this nature that the Hebrew scholars assure us that the book of Ecclesiastes could not have been written during the century when Solomon lived. Evidence of this kind is as decisive as any kind of evidence can be. Scholars who are familiar with the development of linguistic forms, when they come upon language like that of the Hebrew of Ecclesiastes, are just as sure that it did not originate in the days of King

Solomon as you are when you see a Pullman train standing at the station, that it was not built in the seventeenth century. It is by such facts that men as reverent and devout and conservative as any on the earth have been brought to the conclusion that Ecclesiastes must have been written certainly as late as 330 B. C., perhaps as late as the beginning of the second century before Christ. Luther came to this conclusion long ago; and modern scholars as orthodox as Hengstenberg, Keil, and Delitzsch are perfectly certain about it. "Solomon did not write the book himself," says Luther, "but it was composed by Sirach in the time of the Maccabees." Professor Delitzsch, who is the most conservative of all the great German scholars, says: "If the Book of Koheleth be of old Solomonic origin, then there is no history of the Hebrew language." And Dr. Ginsburg, a great Hebrew authority, asserts that "we could as easily believe that Chaucer is the author of Rasselas, as that Solomon wrote Koheleth."

All these results, you will observe, are derived from a careful study of the book itself. Instead of accepting the tradition of the Jews, and the guesses and preconceived

theories of the early Fathers, the higher criticism goes directly to the book itself and asks it to reveal its own secrets. The expert witness holds up to the light the paper on which the will is written, and discovers a kind of veining in the paper which was made by a machine that was not invented until after the date of the will. He does not guess, he knows, that that date is wrong. The document itself has told him so. Now there are water-marks in language, as well as in paper, and the trained philologist speaks of what he knows.

As to the date at which the book was written there is, then, very little doubt that it must have been nearly seven centuries after the death of Solomon, certainly no earlier and probably later than the time of the prophet Malachi.

What, now, is the teaching of the book? That is perhaps the most perplexing question of Biblical interpretation. There is no book which has given the interpreters more trouble. Its structure appears to be composite and fragmentary; Luther's saying, "It is, as it were, a Talmud put together out of many books," is a venture in the right direction. Several disconnected essays, inter-

spersed with proverbs, are thrown together; perhaps it is only the first of these, occupying the first chapter and part of the second, that the author wishes to put into the mouth of Solomon. It is easier to interpret the other parts of the book, if we disconnect them from that character.

When one tries to understand the teaching of the book as a whole, he is confounded by the confusion of the commentators. Dr. Ginsburg, in the "Encyclopedia Britannica," gives us a few of the interpretations: "We are positively assured that the book contains the holy lamentations of Solomon, together with a prophetic vision of the splitting up of the royal house of David, the destruction of the temple, and the captivity; and we are equally assured that it is a discussion between a refined sensualist and a sober sage. Solomon publishes in it his repentance, to glorify God and strengthen his brethren; he wrote it 'when he was irreligious and skeptical, during his amours and idolatry.' 'The Messiah, the true Solomon, who was known by the title of Son of David, addresses this book to the saints;' a profligate, who wanted to disseminate his infamous sentiments, palmed it upon Solomon.

It teaches us to despise the world with all its pleasures, and flee to monasteries; it shows that sensual gratifications are man's greatest blessings upon earth. It is a philosophic lecture addressed to a literary society upon subjects of the greatest moment; it is a medley of heterogeneous fragments belonging to various authors and different ages. It describes the beautiful order of God's moral government, showing that all things work together for good to them that love the Lord; it proves that all is disorder and confusion, and that the world is the sport of chance. It is a treatise on the *summum bonum;* it is a chronicle of the lives of the kings of the house of David, from Solomon down to Hezekiah. Its object is to prove the immortality of the soul; its design is to deny a future existence. Its aim is to comfort the unhappy Jews in their misfortunes; and its sole purport is to pour forth the gloomy imaginations of a melancholy misanthrope. It is intended to open Nathan's speech touching the eternal throne of David, and it propounds by anticipation the modern discoveries of anatomy and the Harveian theory of the circulation of the blood. 'It foretells what will become of man or angels

to eternity, and according to one of the latest and greatest authorities, it is a keen satire on Herod, written 8 B. C., when the king cast his son Alexander into prison.'"

Such an assortment of explanations may indicate that it is not an easy book to understand. Those who propose to take the whole Bible just as it reads will be obliged to put their intellects through a good many contortions before they get through with this book. The Jewish rabbis in the Synod of Jamnia who wished to reject it from the Canon on the ground that it contradicted itself had some reason for their criticism. The book is not self-consistent. The author was living in a very dark day. His nation's hope was almost extinguished; the foreigner had devastated its fields and sacked its cities and carried its people into exile: the long-cherished expectations of Messianic glory were hopes deferred that made the heart sick. There is so much of failure and disappointment and misery round about him that he is driven to take a very gloomy view of life. He doubts if the great kings, even, find any profit in all their splendor; the objects for which men are striving appear to him nothing but emptiness.

"Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, all is vanity. What profit hath man of all his labor wherein he laboreth under the sun? One generation goeth and another generation cometh, and the earth abideth forever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he ariseth. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it turneth about continually in its course, and the wind returneth again to its circuits. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place where the rivers go, thither they go again. All things are full of weariness; man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. That which hath been is that which shall be, and that which hath been done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun." Life is a weary round, a treadmill, — roads that lead nowhither, aims that mock our endeavor, fruits that turn to ashes on our lips. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

Then he brings in Solomon, and makes him tell of his great acquisitions and accumulations and triumphs, and how little they are worth after all. It is all vanity.

Men strive after wisdom, but what is the use of wisdom? the gains thereof are real gains, no doubt, but they are brief: the wise man dies as the fool dies.

Nor is the pursuit of pleasure any more satisfactory. "All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet his appetite is not filled." We toil to gather riches, but who knows who will inherit them?

He turns to religion and its institutions, but they seem to him full of insincerity and emptiness: much of this worship is the sacrifice of fools; there are too many words and there is too little meaning.

He turns to politics, and the corruption and oppression of the rulers and the sycophancy of courtiers fill him with disgust. In the midst of all these illusions he betakes himself to bitter cynicism: —

"In my fleeting days I have seen
Both the righteous die in his righteousness
And the wicked live long in his wickedness;
Be not too righteous therefore,
Nor make thyself too wise lest thou be abandoned.
Be not very wicked, nor yet very foolish,
Lest thou die before thy time:
It is better that thou shouldest lay hold of this,
And also not lay hold of that;
For whoso feareth God will take hold on both.
Their wisdom alone is greater strength to the wise

> Than an army to a beleaguered city;
> For there is not a righteous man on earth
> Who doeth good and sinneth not."[1]

The very cautious and conservative commentator whose translation I have quoted thus paraphrases this passage: —

"He has seen both the righteous die in his righteousness without receiving any reward from it, and the wicked live long in his wickedness to enjoy his ill-gotten gains. And from these two mysterious facts, which much exercised many of the Prophets and Psalmists of Israel, he infers that a prudent man will neither be very righteous, since he will gain nothing by it and may lose the friendship of those who are content with the current morality; nor very wicked, since, though he may lose little by this as long as he lives, he will very surely hasten his death. It is the part of prudence to lay hold on both; to permit a temperate indulgence both in virtue and vice, carrying neither to excess, — a doctrine still very dear to the mere man of the world. In this temperance there lies a greater strength than that of an army in a beleaguered city; for no righteous man is wholly righteous (vs.

[1] Chap. vii. 15–20, Cox's Translation.

19–20); to aim at so lofty an ideal will be to attempt 'to wind ourselves too high for mortal man below the sky;' we shall only fail if we make the attempt; we shall be grievously disappointed if we expect other men to succeed where we have failed; we shall lose faith in them and in ourselves; we shall suffer many pangs of shame, remorse, and defeated hope: and, therefore, it is well at once to make up our mind that we are and need be no better than our neighbors; that we are not to blame ourselves for customary and occasional slips; that, if we are but moderate, we may lay one hand on righteousness and another on wickedness without taking much harm. A most immoral moral, though it is as popular to-day as ever it was." [1]

In this vein of cynicism, Koheleth turns his glass toward womankind, with this result: —

"Then I and my heart turned to know this wisdom
And diligently examine it,
To discover the cause of wickedness, vice,
And that folly which is madness;
And I found woman more bitter than death;
She is a net;
Her heart is a snare and her hands are chains;

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 200.

Whoso is good before God shall escape her,
But the sinner shall be taken by her.
Behold what I have found, saith the Preacher, —
Taking things one by one to reach the result —
I have found one man among a thousand,
But in all that number a woman I have not found."[1]

Any man who can say all this of his mother, his sister, his wife, his daughter, is in a mood from which we may all pray to be delivered.

"All is vanity and a striving after wind!" This is the unending refrain. And what makes life seem so unreal and phantasmal is the feeling that death ends it all: —

"Yet I said to my heart of the children of men
God hath sifted them,
To show that they, even they, are but as beasts.
For a mere chance is man, and the beast a mere chance,
And they are both subject to the same chance;
As is the death of the one so is the death of the other;
And both have the same spirit;
And the man hath no advantage over the beast,
For both are vanity;
Both go to the same places;
Both sprang from dust and both turn into dust;
And who knoweth whether the spirit of man goeth upward,
Or the spirit of the beast goeth downward?
Wherefore I saw that there is nothing better for man
Than to rejoice in his labors,
For this is his portion."

[1] *Op. cit.*, chap. vi. 25–28.

"Thus," says Samuel Cox, whose translation of this passage I have quoted, "after rising in the first fifteen verses of this third chapter to an almost Christian height of patience and resignation and holy trust in the providence of God, Koheleth is smitten by the injustice and oppression of man into the depths of a pessimistic materialism." [1]

It was this ghastly and chilling skepticism that robbed life of its significance. Koheleth had lost the strong hope of his countrymen in the triumph of good upon the earth. That had always been their confidence. Life beyond the grave was not the common expectation of Old Testament saints and prophets. The immortality which they looked for was a corporate immortality, — the continuance of their nation and their life in that. But Koheleth had come to despair of the Messianic kingdom, and he had not yet gained a sure hold of the hope of personal immortality which his people brought back from Persia. Perhaps he hated the Persians too fiercely to be willing to believe a doctrine which they were teaching.

Thus he stands on that desolate theological watershed which divides the old hope

[1] *Ecclesiastes*, p. 148.

from the new; the one he has lost, and the other he has not found. His dark mood reflects this uncertain grasp of the future.

"No doubt," says Dr. Driver, "he would have judged human nature less despairingly had he possessed a clear consciousness of a future life. But the revelation of a future life was only accomplished gradually; and though there are passages in the prophets which contain this truth in germ, and though the intuition of it is expressed at certain sublime moments by some of the Psalmists, yet these passages altogether are few in number, and the doctrine formed no part of the established creed of an ancient Israelite. Koheleth shares only the ordinary old Hebrew view of a shadowy half-conscious existence in Sheol; he does not believe in a life hereafter in the sense in which the apostles of Christ believed it." [1]

You think, doubtless, of those passages in which he speaks of retribution. "Know thou that for all these things God will bring thee to judgment;" "God shall bring every work into judgment with every hidden thing, whether it be good or evil." But we must beware of reading our New Testament ideas

[1] *Introduction*, p. 443.

into all this phraseology. The judgment of which he is thinking is probably the providential retribution of this life, not of the next.

That passage in which he speaks of the dust returning to the earth, and the spirit to the God who gave it, seems to us to intimate his expectation of future existence. It does not agree with what he has said in an earlier chapter: "Who knoweth the spirit of man whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast whether it goeth downward to the earth?" Is this a later and more hopeful mood? Do we here discern the triumph of faith over skepticism? The question is not without difficulty, but I incline to this opinion. The prevailing mood of the writer is one of doubt and despair, but there are gleams of faith and hope. It is not quite fair to call him a pessimist, for his faith in God does not forsake him. More than once, in these dismal moods, there comes into his soul a flash of æonian light. Sometimes he is inclined to take the epicurean view of life, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die;" but the sobering thought overtakes him that even these joys of the sense are the gifts of God and cannot

profit us without his blessing. "Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion and to rejoice in his labor, — this is the gift of God." "Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and prolong his days, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God." These are the voices of faith which are heard from time to time, above the monotonous outcries of doubt, and the cynical counsels of hedonism.

On the whole, then, I think we may regard this book as the picture of the struggle of a soul, in one of the darkest periods of the world's history, with its own doubts and fears. The prevailing tendency of most of these moralizings is skeptical and hopeless; the writer feels that life is all a miserable tangle, yet he holds fast to his belief that "God's in his heaven," and it brings him round to a hope, if not a confidence, that somehow, some time, it must be "all right with the world." No man who believes in a living God can be altogether a pessimist. And I do not see how he can continue to doubt the continuance of life after death. This, as I believe, is the more sure word of

promise to which this writer comes at the end. Let us hear the solemn words with which he closes: —

"Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth,
Before the evil days come,
And the years approach of which thou shalt say
I have no pleasure in them;
Before the sun groweth dark,
And the light and the moon and the stars,
And the clouds return after the rain:
When the keepers of the house shall quake,
And the grinding-maids shall stop because so few are left,
And the women who look out of the lattices shall be shrouded in darkness,
And the sound of the mills shall cease,
And the swallow fly shrieking to and fro,
And all the song-birds drop silently into their nests.
There shall be terror at that which cometh from the height,
And fear shall beset the highway;
The almond also shall be rejected
And the locust be loathed
And the caper-berry provoke no appetite;
Because man goeth to his long home,
And the mourners pace up and down the street;
Before the silver cord snappeth asunder
And the golden bowl escapeth;
Before the pitcher be shattered at the fountain
And the wheel is broken at the well;
And the body is cast into the earth from which it came,
And the spirit returneth to God who gave it." [1]

[1] *Ecclesiastes*, Cox's Translation, p. 107.

VI

THE SONG OF SONGS

"THE Song of Songs, which is Solomon's," is the title of that book of the Bible which ranks next to Ecclesiastes in difficulty of interpretation. Indeed, there are many who would readily yield to this book the palm on the score of obscurity. The first sentence of Mr. Adeney's recent admirable commentary, in the Expositor's Bible Series, is this: "The Song of Solomon is a puzzle to the commentator." The category in which we have put it thus appears to be justified. It is a poem which gives expression in strains of great intensity and beauty to the passion of love, — the love of man and woman, which has always been the central theme of novel and lyric and drama. On the face of it there is no indication of any religious purpose; there is not a word about worship or prayer, or any relation between man and God; the name of the Most High is only mentioned in one phrase which describes

jealousy as "a very flame of the Lord," — and that, perhaps, is no more than a familiar Hebrew figure of speech, — a metaphor for something very hot. For all that appears to the casual reader, or even to the careful student, this is simply a song or songs of human love. If it were not in the Bible, no other interpretation of it would even have been dreamed of.

The question about the literary form of the book has been much discussed. "There are indications," says Mr. Adeney, "that it is a continuous poem; and yet it is characterized by startling kaleidoscopic changes that seem to break it up into fragments. If it is a single work, the various sections of it succeed one another in the most abrupt manner, without any connecting links or explanatory clauses. The simplest way out of the difficulty presented by the many curious terms and changes of the poem is to deny it any structural unity, and treat it as a string of independent lyrics. That is to cut the knot in a rather disappointing fashion."[1] For my own part, I find it difficult to accept in their entirety any of the critical explanations of the form of the poem which have

[1] *Commentary*, p. 3.

yet been offered. It possesses a certain continuity; the heroine, the beautiful Shulamite, appears in every scene, and her character is consistent throughout; but when we attempt to break up the poem into parts, and assign to each its appropriate character, the difficulties are very great.

Still, the overwhelming majority of the scholars agree that we have in the book a dialogue, carried on by two or more speakers. The fact that no names are given, and that the changes of person are not marked, is no evidence that the form is not dramatic. In many of Mr. Browning's dramatic lyrics, the persons speaking suddenly change; the only indication of the change is quotation marks, and of that device the Hebrew writer could not avail himself. In some of the Psalms we have two or more speakers, with no indication but the sense of the language of a change from one to another. In this poem it is evident that we have several speakers. The transition from the masculine to the feminine gender, and from the singular to the plural number, make this plain. What we seem to have, therefore, is a kind of operetta, in which the principal characters, two or three in number, sing to

each other songs of love, very fervid and beautiful; and in which certain other characters or groups of characters, choruses, perhaps, now and then join. The persons named in it are the Shulamite, a rustic maiden apparently from the North Country, and King Solomon. To some of the interpreters it appears that another character, who plays an important part, is introduced. The main question among modern scholars is whether the *dramatis personæ* include this third character, or whether the parts by some critics assigned to him are spoken by King Solomon.

The theory of the book for which Professor Delitzsch is chiefly responsible finds in the poem but two principal characters, King Solomon and the Shulamite maiden. The king has found her and is about to raise her to the throne; the book begins with her introduction to the palace at Jerusalem, and consists of a description of the wedding festivities, with exchanges of passionate protestation between the royal lover and the rustic maiden, and now and then a response by the ladies of the court and other characters acting as chorus.

According to the other modern theory,

suggested first by Jacobi, and developed by Ewald, "there are," in the words of Dr. Driver, "three principal characters, Solomon, the Shulamite maiden, and her shepherd lover. A beautiful Shulamite maiden, surprised by the king and his train on a royal progress in the north, has been brought to the palace in Jerusalem, where the king hopes to win her affections, and to induce her to exchange her rustic home for the honor and enjoyments which a court life could afford. She has, however, already pledged her heart to a young shepherd; and the admiration and blandishments which the king lavishes upon her are powerless to make her forget him. In the end she is permitted to return to her mountain home, where, at the close of the poem, the lovers appear hand in hand, and express in warm and glowing words the superiority of genuine, spontaneous affection over that which may be purchased by wealth or rank."

Such are the two modern theories of the structure of this poem. Before we compare them, it will be well to consider some of the older interpretations. The last chapter contains a succinct résumé of various explanations of Ecclesiastes; the tale of the

interpretations of the Song of Solomon is even longer. The Jewish commentators produced a great variety of explanations, more or less mystical and allegorical, finding in the poem all sorts of occult meanings; and Christian exegetes, following hard after them, have greatly extended the list. In "Who Wrote the Bible?" Dean Farrar's summary of these interpretations is quoted, and it may be well to repeat it here as an instance of the way in which the book has been handled: —

"It represents, say the commentators, the love of the Lord for the congregation of Israel; it relates the history of the Jews from the exodus to the Messiah; it is a consolation to afflicted Israel; it is an occult history; it represents the union of the divine soul with the earthly body; or of the material with the active intellect; it is the conversation of Solomon and Wisdom; it describes the love of Christ to his Church; it is historico-prophetical; it is Solomon's thanksgiving for a happy reign; it is a love-song unworthy any place in the sacred canon; it treats of man's reconciliation to God; it is a prophecy of the Church from the crucifixion until after the Reformation; it is an

anticipation of the Apocalypse; it is the seven days' epithalamium on the marriage of Solomon with the daughter of Pharaoh; it is a magazine for direction and consolation under every condition; it treats in hieroglyphics of the sepulchre of the Saviour, his death, and the Old Testament saints; it refers to Hezekiah and the ten tribes; it is written in glorification of the Virgin Mary."[1] Such is the fruit of the allegorizing tendency. When the human imagination is let loose upon a piece of literature like this with the idea of finding some occult meaning in it, it is capable of yielding some very fantastic results.

This tendency to allegorize was developed among the Jews in the centuries just before Christ, and was taken up by some of the Christian fathers who followed the apostles. Some of these early teachers, both Jewish and Christian, were able to find the most subtle and mysterious meanings in the most commonplace statements of the Bible. Thus Philo tells us that in the text, "With my staff I passed over the Jordan," Jordan means baseness, and the staff means discipline; so that Jacob must be interpreted as

[1] *History of Interpretation*, p. 32.

saying, "By discipline I triumph over baseness." By "the green herb of the field," in the first chapter of Genesis, we must understand that portion of the mind which is perceptible only by intellect. The verse "God did not rain upon the earth" signifies that God did not grant perception to the senses. In the farewell address of Moses, where he speaks of the plenty of the promised land which the people are to enjoy, — great and goodly cities, houses full of all good things, cisterns hewn out, and vineyards and olive-trees, — we are told that cities mean "general virtues," and houses "special virtues," and wells "noble dispositions toward wisdom," and vineyards and olive-trees "cheerfulness and light." So in later days Origen explains that the six water-pots of stone in the miracle at Cana signify that the world was made in six days; and that the two or three firkins apiece which they held indicate the moral and literal and sometimes spiritual sense of the words of Scripture; also, that in the incident of Palm Sunday, the ass represents the Old Testament, the ass's colt the New Testament, and the two disciples sent to untie them are the moral and the mystic senses; while Methodius

wishes us to believe that the calf, the goat, and the ram of three years offered by Abraham in sacrifice were his soul, his sentient faculty, and his mind.

We need not greatly wonder that teachers like these — and the church was full of them — were able to turn the Song of Songs into endless allegories. With the growth of learning, much of this fantastic interpretation dropped away; but one or two leading conceptions persisted and still persist, and the book in most quarters is even now supposed to be an allegory. In the allegorical interpretations the chief characters are commonly supposed to be two; one of these interpretations makes the book symbolical of the relation of God to the believing soul; another, and the most common one, makes it symbolize the love of Christ for his Church. King Solomon, in the drama, is supposed to represent Christ, and the Shulamite maiden the Church; the rapturous songs of love express, as in a figure, the spiritual and divine affection between the Church and her Lord.

Some color is given to this interpretation by those passages in the Revelation which speak of the Church as the Bride, the Lamb's

wife, and also by certain words in Paul's epistles, in which he adopts the same symbolism. And it must be admitted that many devout men in all ages have read this meaning into the words of this old song, and have found consolation and help in the thought that the relation of the Lord to his people could be expressed in its tender words.

Still, the allegorical interpretation is one that nearly all devout scholars of the present day have abandoned. The reasons for rejecting it are obvious enough.

In the first place, there is not a sign or a hint anywhere in the poem that the writer intended us to take it in a mystical sense. An allegory must disclose its purpose. It need not tell us in plain words that it is so intended; something a little less frank than the devices of Snug the Joiner and Snout the Tinker and Flute the Bellows-mender will serve: but the hidden meaning must be always shining through the symbol; the structure of the allegory must clearly reveal what it coyly conceals. "These allegories," says Robertson Smith, "are never without internal marks of their allegorical design. The language of symbol is not so perfect that a long chain of splendid ideas can be

developed without the use of a single spiritual word or phrase; and even were this possible, it would be false art in the allegorist to hide away his sacred thoughts behind a screen of sensuous and erotic imagery so complete and beautiful in itself as to give no suggestion that it is only the vehicle of a deeper sense. Apart from tradition, no one, in the present state of exegesis, would dream of allegorizing poetry which in its natural sense is so full of purpose and meaning, so apt in sentiment, and so perfect in imagery as the lyrics of Canticles. We are not at liberty to seek for allegory, except when the natural sense is incomplete. This is not the case in the Song of Solomon. On the contrary, every form of the allegorical interpretation which has been devised carries its own condemnation in the fact that it takes away from the artistic unity of the poem and breaks natural sequences of thought."

Take any allegory with which you are familiar, and you will see at once that the symbolism is transparent. There is no possibility of mistaking the spiritual intent of the story, the general drift of the teaching. You are not long in doubt when you begin to read "Pilgrim's Progress," as to what kind

of literature you are reading, and what it means. You know that Bunyan is giving you in these flesh-and-blood forms a kind of mask, in which he wishes to disclose spiritual facts. But this poem gives no indication of allegorical intention, and the list of interpretations which I have given to you shows that if the writer was trying to convey any particular spiritual truth, he has met with very indifferent success.

In the second place, if the book were an allegory representing the relations of Christ to his Church, it would seem that either Christ himself or some of the apostles would have been likely to refer to it. Paul made use of this very conception of the Church as the spouse of Christ; but he does not allude to this book, nor is there any reference to it in the New Testament.

In the third place, an interpretation which makes the addition of one more inmate to the harem of that royal rake, King Solomon, the type of the spiritual affection between Christ and his Church is one of dubious moral quality. The character of this king, as it is set before us in the history, is not one that we can complacently accept as a type of the pure and undefiled Nazarene.

"Now King Solomon loved many strange women," says the record, "besides the daughter of Pharaoh; . . . and he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart." If we make allowance here for considerable Oriental arithmetic, the tradition still abides that this man was one of the coarsest and most wanton voluptuaries of history. The theory that he was reformed through his love for a rustic maiden, and that this poem recites the circumstances of his reformation, is one for which there is no historical foundation. "Solomon, the son of David, with all his wisdom, played the fool. The foremost man and Hebrew of his time, he gave his heart to 'strange women,' and to gods whose ritual was not only idolatrous, but cruel, dark, impure. In his pursuit of science, unless the whole East belie him, he ran into secret magical arts, incantations, divinations, an occult intercourse with the powers of ill. In all ways he departed from the God who had enriched him with the choicest gifts, and sank, through luxury, extravagance, and excess, first into a premature old age, and then into a death so unrelieved by any sign of penitence or any

promise of amendment that from that day to this rabbis and divines have discussed his final doom, many of them leaning to the darker alternative. This

> 'uxorious king, whose heart, though large,
> Beguiled by fair idolatresses, fell
> To idols foul,'

is the Solomon of history."[1]

The natural basis of the allegory, if Solomon and the Shulamite are the only characters represented, is the addition of one more favorite to the seven hundred, more or less, of Solomon's harem. There are flattering promises that she shall be preferred above the rest, but this scarcely changes the character of the man, nor of the transaction.

We may admit that polygamy of this wholesale sort was not, to the people of the ninth century before Christ, so monstrous a thing as it is to us; but if we have here a divinely inspired book, the inspiration which created it must have known that the day would come when such a character as that of Solomon would be egregiously unfit to typify the blessed Christ. No matter in what colors this song might paint him, his dark record stands upon the pages of the

[1] *Ecclesiastes*, by Samuel Cox, p. 18.

Book of Kings; and I decline to believe that the Spirit of truth and wisdom ever selected him to represent in allegory the blameless Nazarene, or that the transaction represented in this theory of the poem can fitly symbolize to us the relation between Christ and his Church.

Another consideration has weight with me. That devout souls have read their own devotion to Christ into these fervid words, I have admitted. But it is also true that the use of this book as an allegory has often imparted to religious speech a sickly sentimentalism which is fatal to all genuine manly and womanly piety. The terms in which these lovers address each other are not terms in which believers can profitably hold fellowship with their Lord. The erotic religiousness which has found its excuse in the allegorical interpretation of this book has often been a very disgusting thing. Some of the hymns in which this kind of sentiment has found expression are offensive to all right feeling.

The reasoning which condemns the allegorical interpretation also obliges us to set aside that other modern interpretation which makes this the celebration of a love

affair between King Solomon and the Shulamite maiden. I should like to believe that this book has some ethical uses, and I doubt whether the marital or morganatic relations of King Solomon to any woman on the earth can be profitably considered in any kind of literature, no matter how exquisite may be the poetic drapery in which the corruption is clad. It is true that the advocates of this theory try to show that the royal rake was purified by this experience; but, as I have said, the history is silent about any such reformation; and the foundation which the poem gives us for such a theory is very insecure.

Accordingly I am constrained to adopt the theory of the book to which the great name of Ewald has been given, and which is adopted by Oéttli, and Driver, and Robertson Smith, and Adeney, and our own Dr. Griffis. This is what is known as "the shepherd hypothesis," by which the dialogue is distributed among three principal characters, one of whom is the shepherd lover of the Shulamite maiden, from whom she has been torn and transported to the court of Solomon: to whom, in spite of all the blandishments of the king and the

temptations of the court, she remains faithful, and to whom she returns in the last scenes rejoicing in deliverance from gilded infamy, and exultant in the consummation of an unpurchasable and inextinguishable love.

That there are difficulties in this interpretation I do not deny; it is not easy to fit all the parts of the dialogue to this scheme; nevertheless the dramatic and psychological improbabilities are perhaps no greater by this interpretation than by the other, and the moral anomalies are certainly much less. Understanding the book in this way, it does seem to yield us a noble and beautiful meaning. There will still be Orientalisms with which we must reckon; the frankness of the speech of these lovers is not according to modern etiquette; the book cannot all be read aloud profitably in any company; and we can see some wisdom in the ancient Jewish regulation that it was not to be put into the hands of any one under thirty years of age; still, with the signification which we are now considering, it is not an impure book; the fervent passion to which it gives utterance is one of the strongest and highest principles in human nature; and the lesson which it teaches ennobles human life.

I cannot undertake the analysis of this poem; if any of you care to study its structure, to see how its dialogue is distributed among these characters, you may find in Dr. Griffis's little book "The Lily among Thorns" a popular arrangement of its parts.

Nor would it be possible, as I have intimated, to quote from it at length. Although, in the words of Mr. Adeney, "a poem that contains these principles must be allowed to have an important mission in the world, it does not follow that it is suitable for public or indiscriminate reading. The fact that the key to it is not easily discovered is a warning that it is liable to be misunderstood. When it is read superficially, without any comprehension of its drift and motive, it may be perverted to mischievous ends. The antique Oriental pictures with which it abounds, though natural to the circumstances of its origin, are not in harmony with the more reserved manners of our own conditions of society. As all the books of the Bible are not of the same character, so they are not all to be used in the same way." [1]

As poetry the book takes a very high rank. "The movement," says Dr. Driver,

[1] *Commentary*, p. 59.

"is graceful and light; the imagery is beautiful and singularly picturesque; the author revels among the delights of the country; one scene after another is brought before us, — doves hiding in the clefts of the rocks, or resting beside the water-brooks; gazelles leaping over the mountains or feeding among the lilies; goats reclining on the sloping sides of Gilead; trees with their varied foliage, flowers with bright hues or richly-scented perfume are ever supplying the poet with a fresh picture or comparison; we seem to walk with the shepherd lover himself among vineyards and fig-trees in the balmy air of spring or to see the fragrant, choicely furnished garden which the charms of his betrothed call up before his imagination." [1]

This lovely song of the springtime, for example, has woven its music and its color through all the world's literature. It is supposed to be the maiden's reminiscence of her own betrothal to the shepherd: —

"The voice of my beloved! behold he cometh,
Leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.
My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart:
Behold, he standeth behind our wall,
He looketh in at the windows,
He glanceth through the lattice.

[1] *Introduction*, p. 420.

My beloved spake and said unto me,
Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.
For lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone;
The flowers appear on the earth,
The time of the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;
The fig tree ripeneth her green figs
And the vines are in blossom;
They give forth their fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away!"

And these words also, with which the rural pair depart from the palace to their home in the North Country, and the maiden avows the purity and intensity of her inviolable love, are memorable for their beauty:

"I am my beloved's,
And his desire is toward me.
Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field,
Let us lodge in the villages.
Let us get up early into the vineyards;
Let us see whether the vine hath budded and its blossom be open,
And the pomegranates be in flower:
There will I give thee my love.
The love apples give forth fragrance,
And over our doors are all manner of precious fruits, new and old,
Which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.

. . . . . .

Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm:
For love is strong as death,
Jealousy is cruel as Sheol:

> The flashes thereof are flashes of fire,
> A very flame of the Lord.
> Many waters cannot quench love,
> Neither can the floods drown it:
> If a man would give all the substance of his house for love
> He would utterly be contemned."

From a girl who has flung a palace in the face of a king, these words are not without meaning.

The poem has, then, for me, a deep significance; it is the celebration and glorification of that pure passion of love which is the deepest thing in human life, and which ought to be regarded always as one of the most sacred things. It is neither an accident, nor a morbid perversion of human thought which has given to this great theme a place so central in all literature; it is love or the lack of it which makes or mars most human lives. "What is so old as love-making," asks Mr. Adeney, "and what so fresh? At least ninety-nine novels out of a hundred have a love-story for plot; and the hundredth is always regarded as an eccentric experiment. The pedant may plant his heel on the perennial flower, but it will spring up again as vigorous as ever. This is the poetry of the most commonplace exist-

ence. When it visits a dingy soul the desert blossoms as the rose. Life may be hard and its drudgery a grinding yoke; but with love 'all tasks are sweet.' 'And Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.' That experience of the patriarch is typical of the magic power of true love in every age, in every clime. To the lover it is always 'the time of the singing of birds.' Who shall tell the value of the boon that God has given so freely to mankind, to sweeten the lot of the toiler and shed music into his heart? But this boon requires to be jealously guarded and sheltered from abuse, or its honey will be turned into gall. It is for the toiler, — the shepherd whose locks are wet with the dew that has fallen upon him while guarding his flock by night, the maiden who has been working in the vineyard; it is beyond the reach of the pleasure-seeking monarch and the indolent ladies of his court. This boon is for the pure in heart; it is utterly denied to the sensual and the dissolute. Finally, it is reserved for the loyal and true as the peculiar reward of constancy." [1]

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

Is this the meaning of the poem? If it is, then we need not look for allegorical interpretations or mystic symbolisms; the simple story that the poem tells is full of highest and divinest signification. If the Bible has given us a book which teaches us this pure and ennobling lesson, there is a deep and true sense in which we may regard that book as having been given by inspiration of God.

VII

DANIEL

The book of Daniel has played a large part in the history of the Christian church. Probably no other book in the Bible has been so much interpreted; it has furnished the expounders of millennial theology with a large part of their material; century after century its enigmatic numbers have been calculated and recalculated to make them fit the schemes of the prophets who distinctly saw the end of the world drawing nigh. I remember as well as if it were yesterday a blackboard hanging in the pulpit, on which some of these figures in Daniel were added and subtracted by the preacher, showing with the precision of mathematics that the world must come to an end in 1843. That was the date at which we were then living. And I remember well the chilling fear which fell upon the heart of a child at the sight of these ominous figures, a fear which was never lifted till the sun rose bright and

clear on New Year's Day, 1844. That blessed morning banished many terrors, and loosened the grip of uncanny superstition. I have heard the ravens croak, ever since, with considerable equanimity.

The apocalyptical numbers in this book of Daniel lend themselves to the mystic speculators about future events. There is one particular term of seventy weeks at the end of which something is to happen; and it is explained that these are weeks of years, whatever that may mean. Seventy weeks are four hundred and ninety days; and the commentators have generally supposed that each day in this reckoning was a year. But when this period begins nobody knows; some say at the captivity, some at the destruction of Jerusalem, some at the death of Christ; and there is nothing in the world to hinder anybody from putting the *terminus a quo* at the time of the battle of Waterloo or the landing of the Pilgrims, and then looking out for something very important to happen at the end of four hundred and ninety years from that time. The determination to find in these numbers something of deep prophetic significance has racked the brains and unsettled the reason

of great multitudes of Christians; and all this speculation and calculation and prognostication lands us in the middle of Nowhere. "So far," says Farrar, "from finding any agreement in the opinions of the Christian Fathers and commentators on the subject, we only find ourselves weltering in a chaos of uncertainties and contradictions." [1] It would seem that such a result might have suggested, before this time, that the attempt to deal with these symbols as prophetic might as well be abandoned; that some other explanation of their meaning might as well be sought.

The first six chapters of this book are written in the third person, and the remaining six chapters in the first person. The first part of the book is about Daniel; the second part seems to be written by Daniel. The change from the third to the first person is explained by some commentators on the supposition that in the earlier chapters we have extracts from the diary of Daniel and that in the later chapters he describes his own visions. If we have here a historical work, Daniel was a Jew who lived at Babylon in the reign of Nebuchadrezzar (in this book

[1] *The Book of Daniel*, p. 96.

erroneously called Nebuchadnezzar); and who became by far the most conspicuous personage under the king in the whole realm. In the words of Dean Farrar, "If we accept as historical the particulars narrated of him in this book, it is clear that few Jews have ever risen to so splendid an eminence. Under four powerful kings and conquerors, of three different nationalities and dynasties, he held a position of high authority among the haughtiest aristocracies of the ancient world. At a very early age he was not only a satrap but the prince and prime minister over all the satraps of Babylonia and Persia; not only a magian but the head magian, and chief governor over all the wise men of Babylon. Not even Joseph as the chief ruler over all the house of Pharaoh had anything like the extensive sway exercised by the Daniel of this book. He was placed by Nebuchadrezzar 'over the whole province of Babylon;' under Darius he was president of the Board of Three, to whom all the satraps sent their accounts; and he was continued in office and prosperity under Cyrus the Persian." [1]

Such a mighty man as this should leave a

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 4.

large mark upon all history, sacred and profane. We have considerable history of these times, on ancient monuments and inscriptions; we know much about the great monarchs and their great deeds; but of Daniel no hint is given in any of these historical sources.

In the Old Testament, outside of this book, the name of Daniel is mentioned by only one author, the prophet Ezekiel, who must have been his contemporary. Twice Ezekiel uses the name of Daniel. In one passage, where he is addressing the Prince of Tyre, he says: "Behold thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee." In another passage, threatening destruction against Jerusalem, the prophet declares that "though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness;" "they shall deliver neither son nor daughter." These references to Daniel, in the Book of Ezekiel, are very perplexing. When Ezekiel wrote these words Daniel must have been a young man, perhaps not more than twenty-one or twenty-two years of age, certainly not much more than thirty; and such a man to a Jew would

seem a mere youth ; why Ezekiel should put him between two ancient patriarchs, like Noah and Job, we cannot understand. It would be as if a writer of to-day, wishing to mention three of our most renowned and most revered statesmen, should speak of George Washington, Theodore Roosevelt, and John Adams. It would seem a little incongruous to put a contemporary, no matter how upright and honorable, into such a juxtaposition with two ancient worthies. The natural inference would be that the Daniel of whom Ezekiel spoke was some hero of the faith who had lived long before his day.

If, however, as some explain, the amazing eminence of Daniel, as described in this book, entitled him to be ranked in this way with Noah and Job, then it becomes still more strange that we have no word of reference to him in the other books of the Old Testament which deal with this period. The histories of Ezra and Nehemiah give us all the details of the return of the exiles from Babylon ; but of Daniel they do not seem to have heard. Daniel was living, according to the book, when the first captives returned to Jerusalem ; but he was not among them,

and neither he nor any of the historians of that time explain why he did not go. "We might have assumed," says Farrar, "that patriotism so burning as his would not have preferred to stay at Babylon or at Shushan when the priests and princes of the people were returning to the Holy City. Others of great age faced the perils of the Restoration; and if he stayed behind to be of greater use to his countrymen we cannot account for the fact that he is not distantly alluded to in the record which tells how 'the chief of the fathers, with all those whose spirit God had raised, rose up to go to build the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem.'" [1]

Nor is it easy to understand why the three later prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, are wholly silent about Daniel. They do not seem to have heard of him; and their expectations respecting the future of their own nation are very different from those which this book expresses. They are looking for the immediate and glorious rehabilitation of the Hebrew nationality, while Daniel seems to look for centuries of bondage and persecution. But how could these prophets of the post-exilic period have been

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 11.

silent respecting such a hero and prince as Daniel is here represented to have been?

In some of the Apocryphal books we find a great deal of information about Daniel; but these are known to be romantic tales with no historical value.

Not only is there no mention of Daniel in the Old Testament (apart from those two references in Ezekiel which seem to refer to some person who lived long before the day of this Daniel), but there is no allusion to the book of Daniel nor to any of the events mentioned in it, nor to any of the visions described in it.

What is still more striking, the place which this book occupies in the Hebrew Bible shows that it must have been admitted to the Canon at a very late date. In our Bibles it stands among the prophetical books; it is reckoned as one of the four greater prophets; but in the Hebrew Bibles it is not among the prophets at all; it is among the Ketubim or writings which were esteemed less valuable than the other two divisions, the law and the prophets, and it is almost at the end of the list; it follows after Esther, and is only followed by Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Chronicles. This is a

pretty strong indication of the late origin of the book. If it had been written by such a prince and prophet as Daniel is here represented to be, as early as the sixth century before Christ, it would almost certainly have been placed by the Jews in the collection of the prophets. At least three books which were certainly written after this is supposed to have been written are in that collection; while this book is almost at the end of the collection of less sacred writings made up later and appended to the law and the prophets.

One of the Apocryphal books, written by Jesus the Son of Sirach about 200 B. C., has a list of the Hebrew worthies; among them he names Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets, but he does not speak of Daniel. This is a strong indication, not, of course, a proof, that the book was not in existence at the beginning of the second century before Christ.

Some of the statements of the book are in keeping with what we know of the history of the times, but others appear to conflict with our knowledge, and it is difficult to understand how they could have been

written by one who was living in Babylon at that date.

In the first verse we read that Nebuchadrezzar besieged Jerusalem, and carried away some of the vessels of the temple in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah. It was at this time, according to the story, that Daniel was taken captive. But in the twenty-fifth chapter of Jeremiah we are told that in the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah warned the people of Jerusalem that Jehovah was about to send against them Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon. The terms which Jeremiah uses makes it evident that Nebuchadrezzar had not before appeared before the gates of Jerusalem. The error is not serious; it only indicates a lack of familiarity with the facts which a writer living at the time would not have exhibited. In the second chapter of Daniel the dream of Nebuchadrezzar which Daniel interpreted is fixed in the second year of his reign; but in the first chapter we are told that Daniel and his three companions had been by command of the king for three years under the lore of Ashpenaz the master of the eunuchs, before anything was known of his power of interpretation.

The name Belteshazzar was given by the king to Daniel; and the king himself explains that the name was derived from the name of his God, — Bel, no doubt. Evidently this is what the writer of the book supposed the name Belteshazzar to mean. But this is a mistake on his part. Belteshazzar has nothing to do with Bel. The Chaldean word is Balatsū-utsur, which means "protect his life." The mistake of the writer is something like that of one not familiar with modern European names who should suppose that "Bonaparte" was etymologically derived from "bone," or "Catherine" from "cat."

Most striking of all these errors is the use of the word "Chaldeans" to describe astrologers or magicians. That word was used in this way *in later days;* just as the word "Egyptian" is now used in Scotland to describe a gypsy; but the word "Chaldean" never meant any such thing in the days of Nebuchadrezzar: on all the monuments it signifies simply the Chaldean people, and never the magians. The word "Egyptian" could never have been used to describe a gypsy in the first Christian centuries; if you found a writing, purporting to have

been written in the first century of our era, in which the word "Egyptian" was used in that way, you would be pretty sure that the writing could not have originated at that time; that it must have a later date.

There are many other historical inaccuracies which I cannot stop to mention. They are of small account; they do not affect the value of the book at all, because the book is not history; when we come to get at the real character of it we shall see that these unimportant matters in no wise impair its real worth. But they do make it clear, not only that the narrative is not historical, but also that it was not written in the time of the Babylonian empire.

The most convincing evidence of the real character of the book is yet to be presented. Let it be remembered that the second part of Daniel, that which is occupied with certain symbolic visions, has generally been regarded as prophetic. That is the traditional view of it. These visions of the four beasts, and the ram and the he goat, and all the rest, are supposed to be symbols of future rulers and kingdoms. Daniel is conceived to be a prophet who stands upon the heights of preternatural vision in the sixth

century before Christ, and surveys the coming centuries.

One thing strikes us as remarkable. If Daniel was a Jewish exile, living in Babylon, his heart, like the hearts of all his companions in exile, must have been full of longing for the restoration of the Jews to their own land. But this is a subject which does not enter at all into his dreams and visions. That Restoration was just about to occur, but he has no word of promise concerning it. He is supposed to be unfolding the providence of God concerning his people, but he has not a syllable of encouragement to offer them concerning that great intervention of Providence in their behalf which they are so soon to experience. Instead of this he gives a somewhat vague and general outlook over certain great dynastic changes which are to occur in the Eastern world, and then, after a flight over four centuries, and a bird's-eye view of the progress of history, he suddenly drops down into the second century before Christ and begins to describe, very minutely, the events which were to happen during the reign of a Grecian king, Antiochus Epiphanes.

This prophecy then, if prophecy it is, is

radically unlike any other prophecy in the Bible. All the other prophecies — with the exception of those words which set forth the Messianic hope — deal with events which are nigh, even at the doors. It is the immediate future with which all the Old Testament prophets are concerned.[1] It is the crisis which is impending to which they point; the deliverance at hand which they rouse the people to achieve. All this Old Testament prophecy has immediate reference to conduct, — to the conduct of the people to whom it is addressed. It is no vague prognostication about far-off events; if you have any such notion about it you dimly understand the nature of Old Testament prophecy. Isaiah and Jeremiah and Amos and Micah were men who looked into the future, but no farther into the future than the people to whom they spoke might expect to go; and their purpose was always practical; they were trying to shape that future, through the conduct of those to whom they uttered their message. To have spoken of what would happen four hundred years after they were dead and gone — further than to hold

[1] This assumes, of course, the late date of the last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah.

up the great promise of the prevalence of the Messiah's kingdom — would have been to them a meaningless performance. It would not have comported at all with their notion of their office.

Furthermore, whatever predictions of future events they uttered were always put in a general form. It was only in outline that they sought to reveal the future. They might predict the downfall of a nation, but they never made circumstantial statements about the manner of its overthrow. They do not undertake to give a definite programme of national events. The reason for this is plain. Neither men nor nations are profited by having the future disclosed to them. The providence of God most wisely keeps us in ignorance of what is going to happen to us.

"Heaven from all creatures hides the book of fate."

Our Lord himself expressly said that of the day and the hour of the coming retributions, "knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." To give in minute detail events which are to take place in the life of a man or of a nation would be to paralyze free will and

destroy responsibility. We should have nothing to do but to watch the unrolling of the scroll of fate. This is not God's way of dealing with men. "We walk by faith, not by sight." And all the prophecy of the Old Testament, outside of the book of Daniel, respects this principle of the divine administration. As Nitzsch has said, "it is an essential condition of prophecy that it should not disturb man's relation to history."

If now this book of Daniel was really written in the sixth century before Christ, and does give us a minutely detailed account of the events which were going to happen in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, four hundred years later, the book violates the whole economy of prophecy as it is disclosed to us in other parts of the Old Testament, — first in describing in an enigmatical manner dynasties and personages of which the people of that day could have had no knowledge, for whose doings and misdoings they could have had no responsibility, and whose history must have been a perfect riddle to them; secondly, in giving such a definite programme of those far-off future events as would, if it were accepted as laid down by divine authority, weaken the responsibility

of the people whose life it thus delineated, when the day should come in which the predictions were to be fulfilled.

Suppose that in the colonial days of this nation — the days of Otis and Samuel Adams — a prophet of God had appeared. What would have been his message? Judging from all that we know of prophecy he would have told them, in a general way, something concerning the revolutionary struggle just before them, and its probable results. But suppose that he had wholly ignored the revolutionary period, and had proceeded to give them, in some detail, under symbolic forms, the events of the war of the Rebellion. What could the people of that time have made out of such a prediction? How could they have understood it? What good would it have done them? It would only have filled their minds with confusion. It would have given them no light whatever on the tremendous questions then before them. I doubt whether any of us can persuade ourselves that the Spirit of truth ever sends supernatural messengers to men with such irrelevant messages; or that He ever cripples the free action of any people, by laying down, centuries beforehand, the programme of the

events which are to take place in their national life.

To maintain that the book of Daniel was written in the reign of Nebuchadrezzar, and that it is a prediction which culminates in a detailed description of the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, is to ask us to believe that in this book the fundamental principles of the divine administration are set at naught.

We may well hesitate before adopting this theory. Certainly an easier explanation of the book may be found.

The interpretation is not far to seek. The book is not a prophecy. It is an apocalypse. It is one of the first specimens of a kind of literature which flourished exceedingly in the centuries just before and just after the beginning of our era. "An apocalypse, so far as its literary form is concerned," says Dean Farrar, "claims throughout to be a supernatural revelation, given to mankind by the mouth of those men in whose names the various writings appear. An apocalypse — such for instance as the Book of Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, Baruch, 1 and 2 Esdras, and the Sibylline Oracles — is characterized by its enigmatic form which shrouds its meaning in parables

and symbols. It indicates persons without naming them, and shadows forth historic events under animal forms or as operations of Nature." [1] The author of an apocalypse is apt to put his words into the mouth of some historic or traditional personage of eminence. The cases just mentioned in the quotation from Dean Farrar are illustrations.

The author of this book undoubtedly lived during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, and the sufferings of his people under the reign of this oppressor lay heavily upon his heart. He sought to impart to them a lesson of hope and encouragement. The form of the apocalypse, employed already, to some extent, by Ezekiel and Zechariah, suggests itself to him; and the figure of Daniel, who may have been an historical person, one of the Jewish exiles, connected with the court of Nebuchadrezzar, and concerning whom traditions, and perhaps written narratives, had come down to him, is chosen by him to be the subject of his story. Just how large a portion of these narratives about Daniel consists of fact and how much of it is fancy, we may not know: the elements are woven together after the manner of the lit-

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 77.

erature of that period. In the Apocrypha are several books of this character, none of which, however, compares with this in ethical and spiritual value ; but the literary type is the same. These books were written about the same time that Daniel was written, and the resemblances of some of them to Daniel are very striking. "In short," says Dean Farrar, "the Book of Daniel may be illustrated by the apocryphal books in every single particular. In the adoption of an illustrious name — which is the most marked characteristic of this period — it resembles the *additions* to the Book of Daniel, the Books of Esdras, the Letters of Baruch and Jeremiah, and the Wisdom of Solomon. In the imaginary and quasi-legendary treatment of history it finds a parallel in Wisdom xvi.–xix., and parts of the Second Book of Maccabees and the Second Book of Esdras. As an allusive narrative bearing on contemporaneous events under the guise of describing the past, it is closely parallel to the Book of Judith. . . . As an ethical development of a few scattered historical data, tending to the marvelous and supernatural, but rising to the dignity of a very noble and important religious fiction, it is

analogous, though incomparably superior, to Bel and the Dragon, and to the stories of Tobit and Susanna. The conclusion is obvious; and it is equally obvious that when we suppose the name of Daniel to have been assumed and the assumption to have been supported by a unique coloring, we do not for a moment charge the unknown author . . . with any dishonesty. Indeed it seems to us that there are many traces in this book — φωνᾶντα συνετοῖσιν — which exonerate the writer from any suspicion of intentional deception. They may have been meant to remove any tendency to error in understanding the artistic guise which was adopted for the better and more forcible inculcations of the lessons to be conveyed." [1]

"A very noble and important religious fiction" this Book of Daniel undoubtedly is, — the noblest and the most important religious fiction in the whole Bible. But if it is a work of religious fiction, originating about the middle of the century before Christ, then those historical errors and anachronisms which we have discovered are easily explained. It is not at all singular that errors of this sort should appear at such a

[1] *Op. cit.* pp. 84, 85.

distance from the events referred to; nor are they of any consequence. The value of the writing is not affected by them in the least. They are not intended to teach us history; the character of Daniel, as it is exhibited in this narrative, his heroic fidelity to duty, his sublime courage, his faith in God, sets before us the kind of man that we all ought to be; and to these Jews, themselves walking among ravening lions, and passing through furnaces of persecution, this sublime teaching was exactly what they needed. I suppose that they perfectly understood the meaning of the book when it was placed in their hands; the rapid sketch of the centuries past and the minute recital of events happening before their eyes were intelligible to them, and the grand character of Daniel braced their courage and strengthened their fidelity. Many of the symbolical allusions that are enigmas to us were plain enough to them; some of these mystical numbers with which commentators have been wrestling for centuries referred, I dare say, to processes which were going on before their eyes.

One wonders what the man who wrote this book and the people who first read it would say, if they could be permitted to

come back to earth and read the explanations of it which have been offered by learned men during the last fifteen hundred years!

The greater part of the mystery and obscurity of this book has arisen, therefore, from the attempt to give it a character which does not belong to it, and to treat it as if it were a book which looked forward from the sixth century before Christ, instead of its being a book which looks backward from the second century before Christ. We have dressed the book up in our own prepossessions and conceits and have tried to make its language tally with our theories. We have had exactly the same kind of trouble with it that the astronomers had with the planets while they were sticking to the theory that the earth is the centre of the universe. As soon as they found out that the sun was the centre, a great many of their puzzles were solved. In like manner the Book of Daniel becomes intelligible to us as soon as we discover that instead of being written in the sixth century it was written in the second.

The book before us is not, therefore, history. It is a kind of story, to which the Jews gave a distinctive name: they called it

Haggada; many specimens of these Haggadoth are still extant, quite a number of which originated about this time.

In trying to describe the life of the Babylonian court four hundred years before his day, the writer kept as close as he could to the facts of history and the manners of the time; and in many respects the picture is true to the life of that day. It is rather remarkable that a writer at such a distance from the age of Nebuchadrezzar could have got in so much true local coloring. The author of "Ben Hur" or of "Quo Vadis" had a far easier task, for the immense historical and archæological collections of today were not paralleled by anything within the reach of a Jewish scholar residing in Palestine in the days of the Seleucidæ. Still, there are a good many historical errors and anachronisms, enough to prove, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the late origin of the book. In a work of fiction these errors are not important; the desperate attempts which have been made to reconcile them with historical facts might well have been spared. It saddens one to think of the years that have been wasted in such work, and of the sophistication which has been suffered by

the intellects and the consciences of many theologians and commentators in their effort to twist this narrative into conformity with the facts of history. Intelligent interpreters are well content to turn from these futile and confusing conjectures to the lessons which the book is intended to convey.

If this is Haggada, and not history, then the task of explaining the supernatural elements which it contains need give us no trouble. We are not called to prove the actual occurrence of incidents, whether natural or supernatural, related in a romance. The writer's purpose is all that need concern us; in the structure of his story much liberty is allowed him. For myself I am free to say that what men call the supernatural is not to me the stumbling-block that it is to some; the spiritual, as I understand it, is always the supernatural; the right of reason and love to control physical forces, and to make them servants of the higher interests of man, is a right that I shall never hesitate to affirm; and so long as the spiritual side of man is acknowledged to be superior to the merely physical, so long we have the substance of what I understand by the supernatural. And when any being appears

in history in whom the spiritual faculties are fully developed, in whom has appeared that manifestation of the divine which the whole creation is waiting to see in all of us, in the hands of that man I expect to see the forces of nature pliant and tractable as they are not in ours; I expect to see him easily doing many things that look to me miraculous. So when Jesus Christ is represented as doing such things the statement does not confound me; and when I am told of his appearance after death, there is only in that a sign of the superiority of the life of the perfect spirit to external conditions which is the very substance of my faith and the foundation of my morality. There is no reason, therefore, why I should wish to get rid of any of the supernatural elements of the Book of Daniel simply because they are supernatural; my philosophy does not call for any such surrender. But, on the other hand, it is evident that we are not called upon to prove the actual occurrence of incidents narrated in a work of fiction. What we are concerned with, as I have said, is the author's purpose. For this is certainly fiction with a purpose; we have no other kind of fiction in the Bible. The book was writ-

ten when the Jews were passing through the terrible tyranny of Antiochus; when they were suffering from persecutions which robbed them of their liberties and defiled their sanctuaries and sought to stamp out their most sacred institutions. The lesson that the author wanted to teach the people was that God is always in his world, watching over his own; that it is safe to trust in Him; that no earthly power can withstand his might; that the gates of hell shall not prevail against Him. Deeper than this, even, went the theological purport of this teaching. The God of Israel, Jehovah, was the God of righteousness. In all the great teaching of the prophets his moral and spiritual attributes are emphasized. His power and supremacy are always affirmed; but the reason why He is above all the gods of the nations is that He doeth righteousness.

> "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever;
> A sceptre of equity is the sceptre of thy kingdom."

The bulwarks of his dominion are purity and goodness and truth and love. In this respect the religion of Israel differs fundamentally from the religions of the nations by which it was surrounded. Their gods were the personifications of force rather than of right-

eousness. The fundamental article of the Jewish faith was, therefore, that right is stronger than might; that the moral forces of the universe are the regnant forces. This was the faith of the author of the Book of Daniel; this was the lesson which he sought to impress upon the suffering people of his generation.

Now it is undoubtedly true that his way of conceiving these sublime truths is somewhat different from ours, — more objective, more dramatic, more childish, if you please. The laws of the moral realm, with their rewards and retributions, are always crudely conceived in the beginning; first that which is natural, afterward that which is spiritual. This author shows us virtue triumphing in a manner in which we do not now always expect to see it triumph. We know that the heroic souls who abide with God are safe with Him; but they are not always rewarded by deliverance from physical peril and suffering in this world, and by receiving the crown and the sceptre here. The tragedy of Calvary has given us a deeper insight into the truth of things. We know that the greatest victories are only won by those who lay their all upon the altar of sacrifice, who are faith-

ful unto death. We know that it is not for us to stipulate that the mouths of lions shall be stopped, or the fires of persecution made harmless; like the six hundred at Balaklava, when the order comes, it is ours not to make reply, or to reason why, but only to do and die; like Childe Roland we must set our lance in rest and blow our challenge, even when the dark tower is opening its jaws to devour us, and all the hosts of hell are ranged against us. It is then, according to our faith, that we are conquerors and more than conquerors.

Still, though the costume of the thought may be different, the essential truth of these stories of the Book of Daniel is that in which we rest our souls; we believe, as these authors believed, that it is safe to trust in the eternal Righteousness; that nothing else is safe. To believe that force is ruled by right, that the Everlasting Yea is that which affirms the moral law — this is the victory which overcometh the world. This it was that the author of the Book of Daniel believed; and this it was which he sought to impress upon the minds of his persecuted countrymen in one of the darkest hours of their history.

The first six chapters of this book contain six stories of Daniel and his companions, each of which presents to us this great truth under a different form.

In the first chapter we see the four Hebrew youths, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, dwelling in the king's palace, under the care of Ashpenaz the Rabsaris, or Master of the Eunuchs. They were of royal blood, as we are told, and they had been selected from the other captives by reason of their great beauty and intelligence. Like the Muslim rulers of later times, the Babylonian monarch trained his captives for high service; perhaps it was from this story that the Turk got a hint for his janizaries. For three years these boys were to be subjected to the regimen of the royal household, that they might be made adepts in the occult sciences of divination then cultivated at the East. Their names were first changed; for like most Hebrew names each of them was derived from the name of the God of Israel, in one or the other of its two forms, Elohim or Jehovah. The syllables "El," or "iah," connected with a Hebrew name always denote some relation to God. The fatherhood of God was thus assumed by the Hebrews,

although its full significance was dimly understood. Of course these names which so distinctly recognized the God of Israel would not be tolerated in the Babylonian court, and the four young Hebrews soon found themselves registered and accosted as Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In the invention of these names the author shows his lack of exact knowledge of the Chaldean tongue; for Belteshazzar is not, as he supposes, a derivation from Bel the Chaldean deity, and Abed-nego is undoubtedly meant for Abed-nebo, or "servant of Nebo," one of the Chaldean deities, while Meshach is a name for which there seems to be no known equivalent in the Chaldean language.

These boys were to be fed from the king's table; but to this arrangement they immediately raise an objection. The impression has generally been that their protest was made for hygienic reasons — because they preferred a more frugal and wholesome fare to the luxurious viands of the royal ménage. But it was undoubtedly the dictate of religion more than hygiene which governed them; the sin of eating meats which were not "kosher," or ceremonially clean, according to the Jewish ritual, was being strongly

emphasized at the time when this book was written, and it was natural for the writer to represent this as a point of conscience among the Hebrew exiles. Accordingly the lads are represented as begging to be permitted to live upon pulse and water, by which is meant, no doubt, a simple vegetable diet; and although Ashpenaz hesitates about granting their request for fear that their health will fail under this meagre nourishment, they gain the consent of one of his subordinates, and their experiment is so successful that at the end of the three years they come forth in far better condition than any of the rest of the king's youth. And not only are they superior in physical strength and beauty to their companions, but their intellectual progress has been equally notable; and the king in his conversation with them finds them so far above the rest that they are chosen to become his personal attendants. And the honor and dignity thus simply won is nobly maintained; in the following years they fail not to command the respect of those round about them.

The meaning of this beautiful story lies upon its face. No labored explanation is

needed. These Hebrew lads, under circumstances of great temptation, were true to their own convictions. No matter if the scruple which they maintained was mere ritual requirement; to them it was a matter of duty, and they were loyal to the highest obligation they had conceived. They were in Babylon, but instead of doing what the Babylonians did, they did what conscience bade, and for doing it they found favor with God and men. They were willing to be counted singular and fanatical, to confront ridicule and contempt and perhaps the loss of all things, if so be they might be found faithful to the highest truth they knew. Such is the lesson of this first chapter; and who can doubt that the courage and fidelity of hundreds of thousands of boys, both Jew and Gentile, have been strengthened by the narrative of Daniel and his three companions.

And although the primary motive of these lads in living an abstemious life was religious rather than hygienic, yet there can be no doubt that their experience has served in all the ages to justify and encourage a life of temperance and sobriety; and that those who have sought to maintain the

integrity of the soul by keeping the body under have found their purposes confirmed by this beautiful story.

The second chapter is the story of a dream of Nebuchadrezzar and its interpretation by Daniel. We have here a striking parallel to the story of Joseph, in the book of Genesis. In each of these stories there is a Hebrew boy dwelling in the court of a great king; in each, the boy is represented to possess great physical beauty and intellectual alertness; in each the monarch has a dream which troubles him, and which neither he nor his wise men can interpret; in each the Hebrew boy is called in to interpret the dream, and receives as his reward the prime ministership of the kingdom. There can be little doubt that the author of Daniel was familiar with the story of Joseph, though he enlarges upon it, and makes his narrative more dramatic than the other. There are one or two slight slips of memory, as I have before explained; for he here puts this dream in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadrezzar, while in the first chapter he explains that these boys were by command of King Nebuchadrezzar three years in training, at the end of

which time they were brought before the king for their triumphant examination by him. If Daniel had been made grand vizier in the second year of the king's reign he could not very well have been, by the king's command, three years in seclusion as a pupil in the king's school. Nor is the careful explanation of Arioch to the king that *he had found a man* among the Jewish captives who could interpret the dream, quite consistent with the statement of the first chapter that the king in his examination of the four lads discovered that they knew ten times more than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his realm. If he had made that discovery, it seems natural that he would have called for Daniel before; or at any rate that Arioch should not have found it necessary to tell him of the existence of Daniel. These are simply *nuances* in the story-teller's art; they show that the unities have not been carefully studied by him; he is not thinking very much of the consistency of his plot; his heart is full of the deeper meaning of it.

The feature by which this story differs from its parallel in Genesis is the fact that the king not only could not interpret the

dream, but could not even remember it. This was the exorbitant demand which he made upon his wise men, — that they should first tell him the dream which he had forgotten and then interpret it. With true Oriental arbitrariness he threatens them that if they do not recall to him the dream, they shall all be cut in pieces and their houses be made a dunghill. This they cannot do; but Daniel, who with his three companions belongs to this order of the wise men and is involved in the threatened destruction, begs for a stay of execution, and in prayer obtains from his God the forgotten dream, and also its interpretation. The modesty of the young man in all this transaction, his scrupulous care in insisting that this wisdom of his is but the gift of God, and his courage and fidelity in disclosing a matter that must have been somewhat unwelcome to the king, are all traits of a noble character.

The dream, as Daniel rehearses it, was of an image with head of fine gold, with breast and arms of silver, with belly and thighs of brass, with legs of iron, and with feet part of iron and part of clay. Against this image a stone cut out of the mountain

without hands is mightily projected, which smites the image in its weakest part, its frail and crumbling feet, and pulverizes the whole till the summer wind carries it away as chaff of the threshing-floor, while the demolishing stone grows into a great mountain that fills the earth. The dream, as Daniel explains it, is an outline of the succession of dynasties. Nebuchadrezzar's kingdom is the head of gold; this Daniel makes clear. What kingdoms are represented by the silver and the brass and the iron mixed with clay has been the puzzle of the commentators: but almost all modern scholars agree that they are the Median, the Persian, and the Macedonian, — the latter dividing in the empires of the Syrian Seleucidæ and the Egyptian Ptolemies. The stone without hands is the Messianic kingdom, the kingdom of God, which is at length to prevail over all other empires and fill the whole earth.

Inasmuch as the writer was living in the time of this fourth kingdom, it will be seen that in his symbolic sketch of these dynasties he is looking backward, not forward; and that the only prophetic note is that of the growth of the Messianic kingdom, whose

victory over the tottering empire of Antiochus he is eagerly awaiting.

The one great truth which this vision sets forth is the transiency and essential weakness of all these glittering kingdoms, founded on force and self-will, and appealing only to the love of pomp and splendor, — the certainty of their downfall before the growing might of the empire of righteousness and truth. This was the truth with which the author sought to solace his people, trampled beneath their feet of iron and clay. For, says Dean Farrar, "apart from the Divine predictions of this eternal sunlight visible on the horizon over vast foreshortened ages of time, which to God are but as one day, let us notice how profound is the symbolism of the vision, — how well it expresses the surface glare, the inward hollowness, the inherent weakness, the varying successions, the predestined transience of overgrown empires." [1]

In describing the effect upon the king of the narration of this dream, the writer somewhat oversteps the bounds of probability. However reasonable it might be to suppose that an Oriental monarch would prostrate

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 153.

himself upon his face to worship a Hebrew youth, we can hardly suppose that such a devout spirit as Daniel is represented to be would suffer himself to be the recipient of divine honors; or would have permitted sacrifices to be offered to him and incense to be burned before him. Nor can we deem it consistent that a youth who had refused even to eat of food from the king's table would consent to be put at the head of the whole heathen cult of magians, as the story represents. But whatever lack of *vraisemblance* the story may manifest in its details, the truth that the God of righteousness is the greatest of all the gods, that they who trust in Him shall not be confounded, and that it is his kingdom which shall at last prevail, is set forth in characters of living light. The prayer of Daniel is one that can never fail to express the deepest thought of the most enlightened worshiper.

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are his; and he changeth the times and the seasons; he removeth kings and setteth up kings; he giveth wisdom unto the wise and knowledge to them that know understanding; he revealeth the deep and secret things; he knoweth what

is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him!"

The third chapter is the story of the Hebrew Children, Daniel's three companions. Singularly, although according to the tale he is now grand vizier of the kingdom, he seems to have no part in the events of this chapter; he is not consulted, nor does he in any way intervene for the protection of his friends. Of course the reconcilers who take this for history have explanations enough; they tell us that he was probably absent from the capital on some business of state. Still the erection of such an image of gold as is here described, ninety feet in height and nine feet in breadth, must have strained somewhat the royal exchequer. It would seem that the prime minister must have known something about it. As nearly as I can calculate a figure of that size in solid gold would have consumed a full third of all the gold on the face of the earth to-day, and it is not likely that the world possessed, at that day, one third of its present store of gold. But those who wish to make history of this chapter suggest that the image may have been only gilded, and if that were all, a very small amount of the yellow metal

would suffice. However, we are not now concerned to justify the historicity of the chapter. The story-teller must have his liberties.

What is more remarkable is the attitude of Nebuchadrezzar in this chapter. The same monarch who had prostrated himself before Daniel in the most abject recognition of the might of Daniel's God now proceeds to erect this stupendous idol of gold, presumably dedicated to Bel-merodach or Nebo, the patron deities of Babylon, and to summon all the officials of the kingdom to come and bow down before it. How long this was after the events of the last chapter the writer does not tell us; but the progress of the story gives us the impression that the sudden conversion of Nebuchadrezzar was followed, like many sudden conversions, by a speedy backsliding. The terms in which the despot commands all his subjects to worship this idol, the work of his hands, are sonorous and stately enough.

"Then the satraps and the governors, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and the rulers of the provinces were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had

set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then the herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up; and whoso falleth not down and worshipeth shall the same hour be cast into a burning fiery furnace."

This command the three friends of Daniel, under their new names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, refused to obey. The whereabouts of Daniel himself in all these great festivities we are left to conjecture. The only recusants reported are his three companions, who had themselves been lifted to satrapies, at the time of his elevation, but who had not forsaken the worship of the God of their fathers. It is the Chaldeans, some of the magian priests, who bring to Nebuchadrezzar the report of their disobedience to his decree. The king is wroth, but he offers them another opportunity. Once more the solemn music shall sound; if then they prostrate themselves, well; but if they refuse, the same hour they shall be cast into

the burning fiery furnace, "and who," he demands, "is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" The answer of the three young men is one of the memorable words that time has treasured for us: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king! But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

These faithful ones do not admit that God is not able to deliver them; that is not their meaning; but they do not know that He will find it wise and right to save them alive. That is more than any man in such a crisis can affirm. They were aware, as Dean Farrar says, "that in many cases it has *not* been God's purpose to deliver his saints out of the peril of death; and that it has been far better for them that they should be carried heavenward on the fiery chariot of martyrdom. They were therefore perfectly prepared to find that it was the will of God that they should perish, as thousands of God's faithful ones had perished before them, from

the tyrannous and cruel hands of man; and they were cheerfully willing to confront that awful extremity. Thus regarded, the three words 'But if not' are among the sublimest uttered in all Scripture. They represent the truth that the man who trusts in God will continue to say to the end, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' They are the triumph of faith over all adverse circumstances. . . . It is man's testimony to his indomitable belief that the things of sense are not to be valued in comparison to that high happiness which arises in obedience to the law of conscience, and that no extremities of agony are commensurate with apostasy. This it is, which, more than anything else, has, in spite of appearances, shown that the spirit of man is of heavenly birth, and has enabled him to unfold —

> 'The wings within him wrapped and proudly rise
> Redeemed from earth, a creature of the skies.'

For whenever there is left in man any true manhood, he has never shrunk from accepting death rather than the disgrace of compliance with what he despises and abhors. This it is which sends our soldiers on the forlorn hope, and makes them march with a smile upon the batteries which vomit their

cross-fires upon them; 'and so die by thousands the unnamed demigods.' By virtue of this it has been that all the martyrs have, 'with the irresistible might of their weakness,' shaken the solid world." [1]

The fury of the king whose power to coerce the soul is thus gloriously resisted, the swift execution of the savage decree upon the faithful ones, the awful fate of the servants of the king who sought to execute the decree, and the astonishment and consternation of the king when he saw the three men walking unharmed through the fire and with them a fourth whose aspect was "like a son of the gods," the Messenger of the Covenant, sent for their protection; the haste with which the confounded monarch calls them forth from the furnace, and the promptness with which he once more confesses the God of Israel and makes proclamation that his name shall be revered throughout his dominions — all this is a story that needs no telling where the Bible is published in the common speech of the people.

Is the story true? I have said already that it is absurd to defend the miracles of a work of fiction. But in a larger and deeper

[1] *Op. cit.* pp. 176, 177.

sense it is true; it is true to the highest and divinest principles of human nature; it is a true picture of what man in his noblest moments knows himself to be. Many a man in his hour of trial has thought of the answer of these faithful ones to the king, and his courage has been keyed to the same high resolve. For what they were ready to do is, as every man knows, the essentially and eternally right and true and manly thing to do. It is when this spirit of fidelity to the highest truth he knows makes him ready with undrooping eyelids to look tyrants in the face, and to walk joyfully into the flames of the furnace, that he shows himself worthy to be called one of the sons of God. And this is the true supernatural, — this triumph of the spirit that is in man over the instincts and impulses of his lower nature. The intervention which saves a man from death in such an emergency is a wonder; but the courage and fidelity that faces death without flinching is more than a wonder; it is the sign and seal of a divine humanity.

The fourth chapter of Daniel, like all the other chapters of the first half of the book, is a separate story; its theme is the temporary madness of King Nebuchadrezzar. This

calamity is represented as having been visited upon him as a penalty for his arrogance and pride of power.

A curious lack of unity appears in the literary form of the chapter. It begins with what appears to be a letter or decree of King Nebuchadrezzar in which he recites in the first person a dream that disturbed him, and its interpretation by Belteshazzar, otherwise Daniel. At the twenty-eighth verse the narration changes abruptly from the first to the third person; at the thirty-fourth verse, the first person is as suddenly resumed. If this were a document from the hand of Nebuchadrezzar, the interjection of this portion in which he is spoken of would be unaccountable. If it is Haggada and not history, the imperfect art of the writer easily accounts for it.

This dream of Nebuchadrezzar he is able to remember, and the task imposed upon his wise men is the easier one of interpretation. To this, however, they prove unequal; and it is not until they have miserably failed that Daniel is called in again. In real life the king would scarcely have gone through the motions of summoning these incapables before him, when experience had abundantly

shown him that Daniel knew ten times more than all of them. But the story is told to display the superiority of the Hebrew seer, and the repeated discomfiture of the Babylonian magians enhances the effect.

The dream, as the king rehearses it, was of a great tree, reaching unto heaven, whose leaves were fair, whose fruit abundant, furnishing food for all, in whose branches dwelt the fowls of the heaven, and in whose shade rested the beasts of the earth. While he beheld, there descended from heaven a "watcher" and a "holy one." These terms are characteristic of the post-exilic literature; the Persian angelology greatly influenced the Jewish thought. "It is only after the exile," says Farrar, "that we find angels and demons playing a more prominent part than before, divided into classes, and even marked out by special names." The heavenly messengers, standing in the presence of the mighty tree, cry: "Hew down the tree and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves and scatter his fruit; let the beasts get away from under it and the fowls from his branches." The stump only is to be spared, and this is to be bound with a hoop of iron and brass, and left standing

among the fresh grasses and the falling dews. And now suddenly changes the figure of the dream. The stump of the tree is invested with human attributes, and the angelic judgment proceeds: "Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth; let his heart be changed from man's and let a beast's heart be given unto him, and let seven times pass over him." Figures are greatly mixed in this imagery; the constructive imagination works clumsily. But the watchers and the holy ones announce that all this dream symbolizes the august truth "that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

To Daniel, the king tells this dream and asks the interpretation. "My lord," the seer replies, "the dream be to them that hate thee and the interpretation thereof to thine adversaries." It is a courtly and generous wish that the calamity foreshadowed by the dream might fall on his enemies rather than on the king himself. Yet the interpretation, ominous as it is, is not withheld. Daniel tells the King that the great tree is Nebuchadrezzar himself, and that the denunciation of destruction against it

by the watcher and the holy one signifies "that thou shalt be driven from men and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and thou shalt be made to eat grass as oxen, and shalt be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee; till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

The stump spared among the grasses and the dews is the sign of the restoration of the divine favor, after the king has learned "that the heavens do rule." And the admonition of the seer is faithful and unsparing: "Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if there may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity." But the king, who here represents himself as having earnestly sought the wisdom of Daniel, forgets all about the dream and pays no heed to the counsel given. A twelvemonth later he is pacing the roof of the mighty palace of Babylon, lifted to a great height above the splendor of the encircling capital, exulting in his own magnificence, and saying to himself, "Is not this great Babylon which

I have built for the royal dwelling-place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty," — when suddenly falls a voice from heaven announcing to him the fulfillment of that forgotten dream. "And he was driven from men and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hair was grown like eagle's feathers and his nails like bird's claws." At the end of the days appointed his understanding returned to him, and he knew the meaning of the discipline that had been dealt out to him, humbly confessing his dependence on the God of heaven, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion. "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing, and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven or among the inhabitants of earth, and none can stay his hand nor any say unto him, What doest thou?" So, chastened by the might of God, Nebuchadrezzar is reinstated in his kingdom, his counselors and lords come back to him, and his reign goes on in glory undiminished. And the chapter ends with the stately and solemn words: "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the king of heaven; for all his works are truth

and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is ready to abase."

Those who maintain the historical character of the book of Daniel have sought in vain among the monuments and inscriptions for some confirmation of this narrative. History knows nothing of any such seven years' madness of the great Babylonian king. The mental malady from which he is represented as suffering is not indeed unknown; lycanthropia and cynanthropia are types of insanity in which the patient imagines himself an animal and imitates the habits of the beast. But there is no intimation in any of the historical records which we possess that Nebuchadrezzar was ever afflicted in this way.

If the story is what we have assumed it to be, the explanation is not difficult. The writer is telling about Nebuchadrezzar with his eye on Antiochus Epiphanes. A striking parallel between these two monarchs would present itself to the mind of a devout Jew. Each of them had conquered the holy city Jerusalem. Each of them had robbed the temple of its sacred vessels. Each of them had sought to coerce the Jews into a surrender of their faith. And whatever may have

been true of Nebuchadrezzar, it seems to have been true of Antiochus that he was subject to spells of melancholy that amounted to madness. For this reason he came to be popularly known as Antiochus Epimanes, Antiochus the Mad. It is evident, then, that this story of Nebuchadrezzar is aimed at Antiochus; it is not so much a warning to him as it is a word of comfort to the oppressed Israelites, who are encouraged to believe that One who is able to "put down the mighty from their seats" is their God, and that the haughtiness and pride of the tyrant may speedily come to an end.

The one notable thing in the treatment of Nebuchadrezzar is the gentleness of Daniel's words to him. Room for repentance is offered to him; like the Book of Jonah, and wholly unlike the Book of Esther, this book contains a gospel; the king is graciously admonished to break off his sins by righteousness, if peradventure God will be merciful to him. The Jewish rabbis, we are told, have severely censured Daniel for this lenity; they have declared "that Daniel was subsequently thrown into the den of lions to punish him for the crime of tendering good advice to Nebuchadnezzar; and, moreover, the

advice could be of no real use, 'for even if the nations of the world do righteousness and mercy to prolong their dominion, it is only sin to them.'" It is this fierce spirit of bigotry which, as we shall see in the next chapter, the book of Jonah so clearly rebukes.

The fifth chapter is a most dramatic picture of the downfall of Babylon. Historically it is quite as dubious as any other portion of the book. "Belshazzar the King," the subject of this narrative, is not known to history. He is called the son of another successor of Nebuchadrezzar, but so far as we can learn from the inscriptions Nebuchadrezzar had no such son. Evil-merodach was the son who succeeded him in the kingdom; he reigned about two years. After him came Nergal-sharezer, whose reign lasted four years; then an infant who was nominal ruler for nine months, and who was succeeded by Nabunaid, in whose hands was the kingdom when Babylon was conquered. Nabunaid was not the son of Nebuchadrezzar; he was a usurper. It has been suggested that he may have married a daughter of Nebuchadrezzar, but the narrative gives the impression that his relation was that of

blood rather than of marriage. On one of the Babylonian tablets was found, not long ago, the name of a king, which is somewhat similar to Belshazzar, and it was loudly proclaimed that the monuments had vindicated the historicity of Daniel: but it turns out that this king reigned before the capture of the city. That Nabunaid was the king at the time of the capture is a well-established fact; and he was not slain, but pardoned by the captor and sent to be governor of a distant province, where he died. He had a son whose name was Belshazzar, but that son was never king.[1]

[1] "Belshazzar is represented as *King* of Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar is spoken of throughout chapter v. as his *father*. In point of fact Naboniden (Nabu-nahid) was the last king of Babylon: he was a usurper, not related to Nebuchadnezzar; and one Belshazzar is mentioned as his son. It may be admitted as probable (though the fact has not as yet been found to be attested by the inscriptions) that Belsharezar held command for his father in Babylon while the latter (see Sayce, *Fresh Light*, etc., etc., p. 170) took the field against Cyrus; but it is difficult to think that this could entitle him to be spoken of *by a contemporary*, as 'king.' As regards his relationship to Nebuchadnezzar, there remains the *possibility* that Nabunahid may have sought to strengthen his position by marrying a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, in which case the latter might be spoken of as Belshazzar's father (grandfather, by Hebrew usage). The terms of

Moreover it was not Darius the Mede who took the city and the kingdom, as we are told in the last verse, but Cyrus the Persian. Of this there seems to be no reasonable doubt. This Darius the Mede is thus far unknown to history. In the ninth chapter he is called the son of Ahasuerus, that is, of Xerxes; but Xerxes had no such son; his father was Darius Hystaspes, a Persian; and how his son, if he had had one, could be Darius "the Mede," is not easily understood. Besides, Ahasuerus, or Xerxes, did not come to the throne until fifty-three years after the capture of Babylon by the army of Cyrus. The fact is that the author has got his historical facts considerably confused; he was not so familiar as the monuments and inscriptions have enabled modern scholars to be with the Chaldean successions.

Professor Sayce is one of the most distin-

chap. v., however, produce certainly the impression that, in the view of the writer, Belshazzar was actually Nebuchadnezzar's son. Though Belshazzar was a historical character, who probably held a prominent position at the time of the capture of the city, it must be owned that the representation given is such as to support somewhat strongly the opinion that it is founded upon the Jewish tradition of a later age." Driver's *Introduction*, 468.

guished and one of the most conservative of modern Assyriologists; and in his book on "The Higher Criticism and the Monuments" he gives us the results of the important discoveries which have been made during the past few years. It turns out that that story of Herodotus which has been so often repeated respecting the siege and capture of Babylon is an unfounded tradition. "There was no siege and capture of Babylon," says Professor Sayce; "the capital of the Babylonian empire opened its gates to the general of Cyrus. Gobryas and his soldiers entered the city without fighting, and the daily services in the great temple of Belmerodach suffered no interruption. Three months later Cyrus himself arrived and made his peaceful entry into the new capital of his empire. We gather from the contract-tablets that even the ordinary business of the place had not been affected by the war. The siege and capture of Babylon by Cyrus is really a reflection into the past of the actual sieges undergone by the city in the reigns of Darius, son of Hystaspes, and Xerxes. It is clear, then, that the editor of the fifth chapter of Daniel could have been as little a contemporary of the events he

professes to record as Herodotus. For both alike, the true history of the Babylonian empire has been overclouded and foreshortened by the lapse of time. The three kings who reigned between Nebuchadnezzar and Nabunaid have been forgotten, and the last king of the Babylonian empire has become the son of its founder." [1]

With respect to the personage to whom is attributed the capture of the city the same authority says: —

"Darius the Mede is in fact a reflection into the past of Darius the son of Hystaspes, just as the siege and capture of Babylon by Cyrus are a reflection into the past of its siege and capture by the same prince. The name of Darius and the story of the slaughter of the Chaldean king go together; they are alike derived from the unwritten history which, in the East of to-day, is still made by the people, and which blends together in a single picture the manifold events and personages of the past. It is a history which has no perspective, though it is based on actual facts; the accurate combinations of the chronologer have no meaning for it, and the events of a century are crowded

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 527.

into a few years. This is the kind of history which the Jewish mind in the time of the Talmud loved to adapt to moral and religious purposes. This kind of history then becomes, as it were, a parable, and, under the name of Haggada serves to illustrate that teaching of the law." [1]

So perfectly clear is the unhistorical character of these chapters to the orthodox commentators that some of the most conservative among them now maintain that they are an interpolation of a late writer. But this is a needless hypothesis; the whole matter is made perfectly simple by recognizing the fact that this is not history, but religious story, and that the writer, living almost four centuries after the period in which he places the action of his novel, is not clear as to his facts, and gets his chronology and his characters considerably confused.

The meaning of his story is not, however, far to seek. Here again, while the name Belshazzar is on his lips the figure of Antiochus is before his mind. For, as the author of the First Book of Maccabees tells us, Antiochus, on his return from his first suc-

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 529.

cessful invasion of Egypt, "went up against Jerusalem with a great multitude, and entered proudly into the sanctuary and took away the golden altar and the candlestick of light, and all the vessels thereof, and the table of the shewbread, and the pouring vessels, and the vials and the censers of gold, and the veil and the crowns and the golden ornaments which were before the temple, all of which he pulled off. He took also the silver and the gold and the precious vessels; also he took the hidden treasures which he found. And when he had taken all away he went into his own land, having made a great massacre and having spoken very proudly." Nor is it at all improbable that this haughty conqueror, who had not only robbed but polluted the temple, may have used the sacred vessels in some bacchanalian feast. Such a report may have inflamed the soul of this writer, and he may have been moved to set forth in this story of the imaginary Belshazzar the kind of retribution which ought to overtake a tyrant guilty of such sacrilege. "The story of Belshazzar," says Dean Farrar, "whatever dim fragments of Babylonian tradition it may enshrine, is really suggested by the

profanity of Antiochus Epiphanes in carrying off, and doubtless subjecting to profane usage, many of the sacred vessels of the Temple of Jerusalem. The retribution which awaited the wayward Seleucid tyrant is prophetically intimated by the menace of doom which received such immediate fulfillment in the case of the Babylonian king."

It is a thrilling picture! How many generations of men have been fascinated by its flashing imagery! The reckless monarch, gathering his thousand nobles and his wives and his concubines about him, violating the proprieties of his own court by a brazen exposure of his own conviviality, and finally bethinking himself that he can add to his indecency the pungent spice of sacrilege, and so sending for the sacred vessels of which the Jewish temple had been despoiled that he and his lords, his wives and his concubines may drink therefrom, meanwhile "praising their gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone."

Then comes forth the fateful hand, and traces on the wall the fiery inscription. The noise of the revelers ceases; with chattering teeth and quaking limbs the

king cries aloud to his magians to come and tell him what it means. Once more these useless enchanters are confounded, once more Daniel is summoned. It is the queen mother who now enters to inform the son of Nebuchadrezzar of the existence of Daniel. If this were history we should find it hard to understand how the son could have needed to be told who his father's prime minister was, or why he had held a place so exalted. But Daniel stands before Belshazzar, and the king tells him that if he will decipher the writing he shall be clothed in purple and wear a chain of gold, and be one of three to rule the kingdom.

"Thy gifts be to thyself, and thy rewards to another," answers the man who fears God but not the face of a king. And then with words of unrelenting directness he tells the monarch that his pride and wantonness, his reckless profanation of all sanctities, and his blasphemous defiance of the God of heaven have brought upon him a retribution more condign than that which fell upon Nebuchadrezzar his father. The fiery letters, glowing there upon the wall, are the prophecy of his doom: "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin." "Numbered, numbered,

weighed, divided." The days of your reign are numbered; you yourself are weighed and found wanting; your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

With a few swift strokes the writer brings this story to a close. The king, in the midst of his consternation, keeps his pledge; Daniel is clothed in purple and decorated with a golden chain and proclaimed to be one of a triumvirate to rule the realm. "And in that night, Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain and Darius the Mede received the kingdom."

The application of this parable, the moral of this tale, the author does not impose upon his readers; we can readily supply it. It is easy to imagine him stretching forth his hand toward the palace wherein the proud Antiochus holds his court and crying: "So perish all they who defy the God of heaven, and lay waste his holy place, and profane the sacred vessels of his worship."

We cannot tarry long upon the story of the Lion's Den. This happened in the reign of that Darius the Mede whose existence is unknown to history. Daniel must by this time be conceived by the writer as a vener-

able man ; he still maintains his eminence in the affairs of state ; he is one of a triumvirate of presidents, who supervise all the doings and the accounts of the hundred and twenty satraps, in charge of provinces, and so wise and upright is he that the king meditates advancing him to the chancellorship of the whole realm. This excites the jealousy of the other officials, and they resolve to compass his downfall. Civil delinquency they despair of finding in him ; on one thing only can they count, — an unswerving obedience to the law of his God. If by means of this they can bring him into collision with the law of the realm, they may be able to depose him. Accordingly they are represented as crowding tumultuously into the king's presence, and obtaining from him a decree that "whoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions." The imagination of the writer has free rein just here ; it is scarcely conceivable that any sane monarch could promulgate a decree which it would be so utterly impossible to enforce, and which, if it were obeyed, would simply put an end to human intercourse. But the king is over-

borne by this mob of office-holders, and promulgates the interdict which they have written for him. Why he does it without a word of consultation with the greatest man in all his realm, the writer does not tell us. The plot is successful: Daniel, of course, openly disobeys the interdict, praying thrice a day with his windows open toward Jerusalem; his disobedience is reported to the astonished king, who weakly tries to find a way out of the dilemma into which he has suffered himself to be drawn, but is finally coerced by the rigor of his own prerogative. Daniel is thrown to the lions by the king, who timidly hopes that the God whom he trusts will deliver him. The anxiety and distress of the foolish king, the security of Daniel among the lions, whose mouths the angel of the Lord had closed, the gratitude of the monarch when he found Daniel safe in the early morning, and the swift vengeance upon the men who had accused him, who, with their children and their wives were flung to the ravenous beasts and devoured in a twinkling, — all this is an old story. The last fierce touch is the only ethical blemish in the book, — the destruction of these wives and children for the

misdoing of their husbands and fathers is one of those marks by which we measure the defective morality of that old day.

The story does not need to be expounded. The fidelity of Daniel to his convictions; his determination to let no ordinance or decree of man separate him from his God; his mighty affirmation of the great truth that the human soul must be left free to worship its God in its own way — this is a truth which was dimly apprehended in that time, but on which as on a firm foundation the best civilization of the world is resting to-day. Antiochus was seeking to coerce the Jewish people into apostasy to their faith. "Moreover," says the author of First Maccabees, "King Antiochus wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and every one should have his laws; so all the heathen agreed according to the commandment of the king, yea, many also of the Israelites consented to his religion, and sacrificed unto idols and profaned the Sabbath. For the king had sent letters by messengers unto Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, that they should follow the strange laws of the land, and forbid burnt offerings and sacrifice and drink offerings in the

temple, and that they should profane the Sabbaths and festival days; and pollute the sanctuary and holy people; set up altars and groves and chapels of idols, and sacrifice swine's flesh and unclean beasts; that they should also leave their children uncircumcised, and make their souls abominable with all manner of uncleanness and profanation; to the end they might forget the law and change all the ordinances; and whoever would not do according to the commandment of the king, he said, he should die."

Such was the issue which then presented itself to faithful Israelites. The story of Daniel cast into the lion's den for his heroic adherence to the faith of his fathers, and of the great deliverance that came to him, was calculated to strengthen the courage and the confidence of those into whose hands this writing fell. They saw in the conduct of Daniel a type of the kind of testimony which every servant of the living God ought to be ready to bear; and they knew that whether life or death should be their portion they were safe in the hands of the mighty God to whom in the hour of peril they thus committed their souls.

To the closing chapters of this book I

can give but a word. I have already so fully indicated the character of the book, that a labored exposition of the apocalyptical visions is scarcely necessary. That they describe in mystic symbolisms the historical periods between the reign of Nebuchadrezzar and the tyranny of Antiochus is now the all but unanimous verdict of Christian scholars; and for us they have but one great word, and that is the utterance of the Messianic hope which the writer more than once clearly expresses. Evidently it was his expectation that the kingdom of light and love was to follow almost immediately the downfall of the Antiochian tyranny. Probably, too, like most of those who had spoken of this coming kingdom, his conceptions of it were dim. But while he makes no claim to a place among the prophets of Israel, his soul, like theirs, is kindled with the expectation of a reign of righteousness which was yet to fill the earth with peace and plenty. To us it seems clear that the spiritual Israel, rather than the rehabilitated Jewish nationality, was the glory of the future that caught their straining vision; but they hailed its brightness from afar. A century and a half was yet to pass before the

dawning of that Day-star. "The divinest side of Messianic prophecy," says Dean Farrar, "is the expression of that unquenchable hope and of that indomitable faith, which are the most glorious outcome of all that is most Divine in the spirit of man. That faith and hope have never found an ideal or approximate fulfillment save in Christ and in his kingdom, which is now and shall be without end."[1]

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 163.

VIII

JONAH

If we admit the possibility of the employment of the imagination in the production of the Scriptural writings, a place is easily found for the Book of Jonah. That it is a work of the imagination, resting upon some historical foundations, is the belief of most of the Biblical scholars of the present day. So exceedingly cautious and conservative a teacher as the former President of Yale, Dr. Theodore Woolsey, is quoted by his friend Professor Fisher as holding "that this remarkable book was originally meant to be an apologue, — an imaginative story, linked to the name of an historical person, a prophet of an earlier date, and was composed in order to inculcate the lesson with which the narrative concludes." Dr. Lyman Abbott has said no more than this. If the estimate of President Woolsey and Professor Fisher and most modern Biblical scholars can be accepted, the questions respecting

the preternatural features of the narrative at once drop out of the discussion. That which is grotesque and fantastic in the story may easily be explained by reference to the intellectual conceptions of the times when it was written; we are no more concerned with this than we are with the scientific or astronomic opinions of the Biblical writers, which, as we very well know, were not like ours.

That the story is fiction and not history will appear upon examination. There was a prophet Jonah, who lived in the time of Jeroboam II., in the ninth century before Christ. In the Second Book of Kings we read of certain prophecies uttered by Jonah the son of Amittai, which seem to have had some influence upon the conduct of the king; but none of these prophecies are preserved. It is not impossible that he was a man of eminence in that reign, and that he was sent on some embassy to the court of Assyria, whose capital of Nineveh was then a powerful city. It is not improbable that he may have preached righteousness in that city, and that his preaching was not unfruitful. Respecting that errand and its results traditions may have come down to the writer of

this story, which was probably composed during the fifth century before Christ, or perhaps four hundred years after the day of Jonah the son of Amittai. The tradition is that Jonah wrote the book, but there is not a word in the book itself nor anywhere else in the Bible on which to base such a tradition; it is a story about Jonah; he is always put in the third person; and the attribution to him of the authorship is one of those utterly baseless conjectures out of which the traditional theory of the Old Testament has been so largely fabricated.

That the book is not historical and was not written by the prophet Jonah, is indicated by several obvious considerations. First, the reference to Nineveh is one that a writer living in the days of Jeroboam II. would not be likely to make. He speaks of it as if it were a city of ancient history, concerning which his readers needed information. "Now Nineveh," he explains, "was an exceeding great city, of three days' journey." The circumference of the wall seems to be intended by the last phrase. To an Israelite living in the ninth century before Christ such an explanation would have been unnecessary; and one speaking of the capi-

tal of Assyria at the time of its glory would not have said, "Now Nineveh *was* an exceeding great city." A writer living four hundred years later, when Nineveh had been for a hundred years a ruin, would naturally have spoken of it in this manner.

In the second place, it is incredible that such a complete moral and religious revolution as is here depicted should have taken place without leaving some record of itself in history. We know, from the monuments, much about the great events in the Assyrian annals, but they give us no hint of such a national overturning of thought and life as is here described. So far as we can learn, the Ninevites were always idolaters, worshiping the gods of their own nation; and it seems psychologically impossible that the preaching of a Hebrew prophet could have produced such an absolute change of opinion and conduct in the whole population as is here delineated. It is said that as the result of the preaching of Jonah the people of Nineveh "believed God:" that is, they accepted the Hebrew divinity; "and they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, *from the greatest of them even to the least of them.*" This is a result of preaching which

is wholly unexampled in all the records of the church. No such immediate conversion of an entire population from one faith to another has ever been known. And it is difficult to believe that such a tremendous moral and religious overturning should have occurred without leaving a trace of itself anywhere upon the monuments and inscriptions of ancient Nineveh.

Furthermore, the prophets immediately following the time of Jonah, the son of Amittai, have a great deal to say about Nineveh. Isaiah, Hosea, Zephaniah, Nahum, give us much information concerning the Assyrian capital, and direct against it some weighty woes and denunciations, but none of them so much as intimates any knowledge of such an event as is here described. They speak of the Assyrians as if they were and had always been idolaters; they do not allude to any previous conversion of the Ninevites to belief in the Jewish religion. It seems incredible that such an immense victory for the Jewish faith over the Assyrian idolatry could have occurred only a few years before their day without these great prophets knowing it; and it seems equally incredible that if they had

known of it they should not have alluded to it in the prophecies and admonitions and exhortations which they address to the people of Nineveh. To my own mind this fact is entirely conclusive.

Something is added to this historical improbability by the fact that the name of the Assyrian king is not given. The great monarchs of Assyria during all these years were important historical personages; it would seem that one writing at the time would have thought it worth while to mention the king's name.

The character of the book is thus pretty clearly established; it is a story, composed probably after the exile, by some writer of remarkable religious insight, for the inculcation of certain truths which greatly needed to be impressed upon the Hebrew mind. What these truths were our study of the story will make plain.

The word of the Lord came to Jonah, bidding him arise and go to Nineveh and cry against it because its iniquity had come up before God. To the heavenly vision thus vouchsafed him, Jonah is promptly and obstinately disobedient. Instead of going eastward to Nineveh, he turns his face directly

westward, going down to the Mediterranean coast and taking passage on a ship bound for Tarshish in Spain. His reason for going, as he confesses later, is his unwillingness to deliver the message thus committed to him; and his unwillingness arises from his fear that God will not inflict the doom denounced upon the city, but will be moved by the penitence of the Ninevites to annul the penalty. In that case Jonah would suffer some loss of reputation as a prophet, and Jonah cares more for his reputation as a prophet than for the success of his message. His sudden flight to the seacoast is due to his idea that if he can get away from the Land of Israel he will be out of the jurisdiction of the God of Israel. So he pays his fare for Tarshish, and sets forth, — neither the first nor the last man who has tried to run away from God; not the first nor the last who has imagined that a short sea voyage would put him beyond the reach of the obligations of duty.

But a great storm arose; and the superstitious sailors are sure that Nemesis is in pursuit of them, so they "cry every man unto his god." It would seem that more than one faith must have been represented among

them: each man prays to his own divinity. But the storm does not abate, and at length they bethink them of a passenger, asleep in the hold, who owes allegiance to some other god. So they wake him up and call upon him to pray to his god: peradventure He is the god whose wrath has raised this tempest. But while Jonah is praying they will try to find out in another way whose fault has brought this storm upon them. The lot will tell the culprit, and the lot falls on Jonah. And now the poor runaway prophet makes a full confession. He tells them that he is a Hebrew; he fears the God of heaven, "which hath *made the sea* and the dry land." This is a fact which, apparently, he had not fully estimated. The sea — that portion of it, at least, which was contiguous to the land of Israel — was under the dominion of his God; he had reckoned ill when he thought to get away from Jehovah by the way of the sea. He now perceives that retribution has overtaken him; and the sailors, to whom he has confessed that he is fleeing from the presence of Jehovah, are very much afraid. "What shall we do unto thee," they cry, "that the sea may be calm unto us? And he said unto them, Take me up and cast me

forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you." That is a magnanimous word, surely; the prophet is not destitute of nobleness. But these heathen sailors are also humane men. They are not willing to save their own lives by the sacrifice of the life of Jonah; so they fall to their oars and row lustily to get him back to land, but their labor is vain; more and more boisterously blows the wind off shore; they can make no headway against it.

So now they lift up their cry, not to their own gods, but to the God of Jonah — to Jehovah (for this is the Hebrew word which always stands in the text when Lord is printed in small capitals): "We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood. So they took up Jonah and cast him forth into the sea, and the sea ceased from her raging." To the heathen sailors this is clear evidence that Jehovah is a God of power; they offer to Him sacrifices and vows.

What happened to Jonah I do not need to tell. After his marvelous deliverance, the order to proceed to Nineveh is repeated.

The prophet now obeys: he delivers his message, threatening the destruction of the city within forty days; the people of the city "believed God, and they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them unto the least of them. And the tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne and laid his robe from him and covered him with sackcloth and sat in ashes." To all his people he proclaims the same solemn fast, commanding them to cry mightily unto God, the God of Israel, with hearty repentance, turning every one from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. "Who knoweth," says the king, "whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not? And God saw their works that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil which he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not."

And now Jonah is indignant. This is just what I expected, he cries, before I started to run away to Tarshish. I knew it would turn out just so. "I knew that thou art a gracious God, and full of compassion, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, and

repentest thee of the evil." I knew that if these Ninevites turned from their sins they would be forgiven, and all my threatening would go for nothing. What is the use of being the prophet of such a God as this? "Therefore now, Jehovah, take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Behold now the gentleness of God as this writer conceives Him! To this petulant, perverse, narrow-minded servant of his, how patient and considerate is his answer. "And the Lord said, Doest thou well to be angry?" But Jonah flings himself out of the city and makes him a shelter from the heat, and sits down in a pout to see what will become of the city. And the tender care of the gracious God follows the sulking prophet to this retreat and spreads a comforting shade over him; and while this refreshment lasts his spirit is somewhat mollified; but the vine that sheltered him is withered by the heat, and Jonah's faith fails with his fainting body, and again he cries to God to end his days. And now, again, comes the gentle rebuke of Jehovah. "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry even unto death. And the

Lord said, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night and perished in a night: and should I not have pity on Nineveh, that great city; wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand: and also much cattle?'

Thus abruptly does the story end. What happened to the city, what became of Jonah, the author does not care to tell. He has delivered his message; he has thrown his flash-light into the darkness of Hebrew bigotry and exclusiveness; and there is no need to add another word.

The suggestion has been made that this story is a satire. To us it has the effect of satire, but I am not clear that this was its intention. To us, the picture of a prophet who starts to run away from the presence of God, and thinks that he can escape from Him by taking a ship at Joppa and paying his fare to Tarshish; who gets angry because the people to whom he is sent to preach righteousness repent and are forgiven; who cares more for the preservation of a gourd that shelters him from the heat of the sun than for the life of the people of a great

city — such a prophet as this is so utterly stupid, ignorant, selfish, unspiritual, that it seems nothing short of ridiculous to call him a prophet. But it is not at all certain that notions like these seemed ridiculous to many of those who first read this book; and it may be that they needed to be told, gently and seriously, the very truths which this prophet seems so feebly to grasp. Let us see what are the most important of these truths:

1. Jehovah is not the God of the people and the land of Israel; he is the God of the whole earth. As we saw in our study of the Book of Judges, this idea was not the original conception of the Hebrews; they supposed that every nation had its own god: Jehovah was their God, greater than any of the others, but not the only deity. Jonah is represented by this writer as holding this ethnic conception of Jehovah; the writer seeks to show his readers that this is an erroneous conception; that one does not escape from Jehovah by fleeing from the land of Canaan. Probably he meant also to teach us that it is not only wrong but supremely foolish to try to evade any duty.

2. The Ninevites as well as the Israelites

are dear to Jehovah. It is not those alone who deem themselves his chosen people for whose welfare He cares; toward the heathen, even toward the idolaters He has purposes of mercy. "The real design of the narrative," says Dr. Driver, "is to teach, in opposition to the narrow, exclusive view, that God's purposes of grace are not limited to Israel alone, but that they are open to the heathen as well, if only they abandon their evil courses and turn to Him in true penitence. . . . The Israelites had suffered so much at the hands of foreign oppressors that they came to look upon the heathen as their natural foes, and were impatient when they saw the judgments uttered against them unfulfilled. Jonah appears as the representative of the popular Israelitish creed."[1] This is the character which the author has drawn; this is the spirit which he holds up, not to ridicule, as I take him, but to judgment and condemnation. Our God is not the God of the Jews only but of the Gentiles also, he declares: all the peoples of the earth are the objects of his love and care. "It might well be said," says Friedrich Bleek, "that the all-embracing fatherly love of God,

[1] *Introduction*, p. 302.

which has no respect for person or nation, but is moved to mercy on all who turn to Him, is brought into view in no book of the Old Testament in a way so impressive and so nearly approaching the Christian religion as it is in this book."[1]

3. Still another lesson may be learned from this book, not only by Jews of the fifth century before Christ but by Christians of the nineteenth century after Christ. All God's threatenings of penalty are conditional. To the truly penitent his grace extends. What his law wants is not retribution but righteousness. His law is honored only when it is obeyed. He is not a Shylock, stickling for his pound of flesh. That was what troubled Jonah. Jonah thought that a God who forgave sinners when they repented, and just because they repented, could never manage this universe at all. "What will become of the law," he wanted to know, "if men are forgiven when they repent of their sins? And what will become of my theology? And what will become of me?" That cry has been heard from a great many theologians since Jonah's day. But Jonah found out that the Judge

[1] *Introduction*, vol. ii. p. 186.

of all the earth desires not retribution so much as repentance; and that He finds it perfectly safe to forgive and to love those who are sorry for their sins and who want to do right. The author of the Book of Jonah was not the first who found out this truth; Jeremiah before him, Ezekiel after him, perhaps, made the same discovery: "At what instant," says Jehovah by the mouth of Jeremiah, "I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy it; if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." That is the substance of the great truth which the book of Jonah is written to declare. The Jews understood, in part, that repentance might avert retribution threatened against themselves: but this book shows them that the same divine clemency is extended to the people of every nation.

And in the last verse of the book there is a touch of the divine compassion, more tender than we find elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures. And the Lord said, "Should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city; whence are more than sixscore thousand

that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand: and also much cattle?" Think of it, Jonah. There are not less than one hundred and twenty thousand little children, — innocent children, in that city. You want to call down fire from heaven to consume the city. Perhaps many of those who have grown old in sin may deserve that doom, but how about these little ones? Do you want to burn them all up with the rest?

I suppose that Jonah, if he had been the average Jew, living five or six centuries before Christ, would have been struck fairly dumb by this suggestion. That children should be punished for the sins of their parents was a matter of course. They always had been; that was supposed to be in perfect conformity with justice. It was not only the Jewish conception; it was the Roman conception as well; that children must suffer with their parents was the universal idea; the sense of individual justice which says in the later words of Ezekiel, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son," had not yet found expression. Were not the children of the

Canaanitish cities exterminated with their parents? Did not the decree of Mordecai provide that the children of the Persians were to be slaughtered with their fathers and mothers? Did not one of the Psalmists sing —

"O daughter of Babylon, that art to be destroyed,
Happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us:
Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones
Against the rock."

This was the common idea of that day; but upon the mind of the writer of this book has dawned a different idea. The God whom he has learned to love and trust is one who cannot be pleased with the sacrifice of the innocent on the altars of vengeance. Think of it, Jonah! one hundred and twenty thousand innocent babies in Nineveh — should not I have pity on them? The God who says this is not the God of Joshua, nor of Esther, nor even of Daniel; the writer of this book has caught a glimpse not only of the divine compassion but of the divine justice far clearer than any which was seen by most of the men of his day.

And his insight goes deeper still. The God whom he believes in cares not only for

little children, he loves also our humbler fellow creatures; their sufferings are matter of concern to Him. Not only are there six-score thousand little children in that city on which Jonah wants to call down fire from heaven, "*but also much cattle*"! Should not I have pity on that city? Thus it was that to this old writer dwelling in the twilight of the centuries before Christ there came such a vision of the divine gentleness as few in any age have shared. It is his voice, heard through the noises of the cruel and bloody ages, to which the poet of our own time makes response: —

"O sweeter than the marriage feast
'T is sweeter far to me
To walk together to the kirk,
With a goodly company.

"To walk together to the kirk
And all together pray,
While each to his great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
And youths and maidens gay.

"Farewell, farewell, but this I tell
To thee, thou wedding guest,
He prayeth well who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast;

"He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small, —
For the dear God who loveth us
He made and loveth all."

Such is the conception of God which has been vouchsafed to the author of the Book of Jonah. I think that no higher, purer, more spiritual conception is found in any book of the Old Testament. That any man should have seen these great truths at that day so clearly is very wonderful. I think that he was an inspired writer, — not inspired to write history, but to write a story filled with great and worthy thoughts of God. "I have read the Book of Jonah," says Professor Cornill, "at least a hundred times, and I will publicly avow, for I am not ashamed of my weakness, that I cannot even now take up this marvelous book, nay, nor even speak of it, without the tears rising to my eyes, and my heart beating higher. This apparently trivial book is one of the deepest and grandest that ever was written, and I should like to say to every one who approaches it, 'Take off thy shoes, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' In this book Israelitish prophecy quits the scene of battle as victor, and as victor in its severest struggle, that against self. In it the prophecy of Israel succeeded, as Jeremiah expresses it in a remarkable and well-known passage, in free-

ing the precious from the vile and in finding its better self again." [1]

With this brief study of the Book of Jonah our task comes to its close. I will venture to hope that to some of those who have gone with me, these books are somewhat less puzzling than they were when we began to study them; that they are less mysterious, less magical, perhaps, but no less instructive and stimulating. The serious trouble in interpreting most of them has arisen, as we have seen, from a failure to take them for what they are; from an attempt to make history out of fiction, and dogma out of drama, and allegory out of simple poetry, and prediction out of apocalypse. Only recognize the truth that we have in the Bible several different kinds of literature, each of which must be interpreted according to its own laws, and a large share of our difficulties at once disappears. The Bible at once becomes a different kind of book from that which we once supposed it to be; but it is certainly not less interesting, not less inspiring. Start with the assumption that every sentence of the Book of Job or of the Book of Ecclesiastes is God's word, and you have a problem on

[1] *The Prophets of Israel*, Chicago ed., p. 171.

your hands in solving which you are liable to lose your intellectual integrity and dim your moral insight. Accept the truth that you are dealing with literature whose forms are more or less dramatic, and the solution is simple. Find out the true character of the book of Daniel and the date at which it was written, and most of the enigmas of the book are at once explained. Believe with President Woolsey that Jonah is a religious story, written to set forth those worthier ideas of God and his kingdom into which the writer had been divinely led, and the questions over which men have been disputing for generations at once pass from the field of vision.

Have not these studies made it plain that the facts respecting the true character of the Bible are facts which the people need to know? They are known to most Biblical scholars of repute; they are distinctly taught in many of our theological seminaries, and the people ought to know them. We can afford to tell the truth about the Bible. It will not hurt the Bible, and it will not hurt the people. After the truth is all told it will still be the Book of books, dearer to all who love righteousness and God than it ever was before.

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